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CHURCH AND KINGDOM
NEW PERSPECTIVES
OF EVANGELIZATION

Edited by

Kuncheria Pathil

JEEVADHARA

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

Church and Kingdom New Perspectives of Evangelization

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CONTENTS

	page
Editorial	249
Trends and Issues in Evangelization in India: Facts, Figures and Views	251
<i>Augustine Kanjamala</i>	
The Church as Mission A Reflection on Mt. 5:13-16	271
<i>George M. Soares-Prabhu</i>	
Mission Without the Church	282
<i>Jacob Kavungal</i>	
Individual Conversions or Evangelization of Cultures	293
<i>Anto Karokaran</i>	
A New Spirituality for the Mission of the Church in India Today	314
<i>Subhash Anand</i>	
Salvation and Evangelization	325
<i>Paul Puthanangady</i>	
Discussion Forum: Neither Christomonism nor Christodualism	336
<i>Raimon Panickar</i>	

Editorial

Is the Mission of the Church in India in crisis? Is there a dampening of the missionary zeal due to new theological and missiological trends? Or, are we entering into the threshold of a new era of mission with a radically new concept of evangelization which requires a new missionary style and praxis? At the National Consultation on Mission, organized by the CBCI Commission for Proclamation and Communication at Pune in 1994, these and similar questions came up again and again. This Number of *Jeevadhara* tries to pursue some of these questions and highlight the new perspectives of evangelization today.

The National Mission survey conducted in 12 ecclesiastical regions and in 35 sample dioceses revealed several important facts and figures, conflicts and tensions. 84% of our missionaries in India today think that the Church has to make a shift from ecclesio-centred mission to Christ-centred and Kingdom-centred mission. The vast majority of the interviewers believe that other religions are legitimate ways of salvation to their adherents. Hence the traditional missionary paradigm of preaching or proclamation, individual conversion and planting a ready-made Church from outside for those who are baptized and separated from their own communities has become to a large extent obsolete.

This does not in any way mean a retreat from the mission or a weakening of the missionary spirit of the Church. The Church is indeed missionary by its very nature and vocation. The Church is called in a special way to participate in the mission of God and of Jesus Christ of transforming the entire humanity and the whole creation into the Kingdom of God. It has a threefold ministry of *kerygma* (prophetic proclamation), *koinonia* (being and becoming a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom) and *diakonia* (the service of midwifing the emergence of the Kingdom). The Church's mission is therefore not one of enlarging its own

territories and institutions, but to be at the service of the Kingdom without any triumphalistic and exclusivistic claim. Such a mission can be fulfilled only in genuine dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies, and by totally involving in the life and struggles of the people for freedom, justice and human dignity. It should be done in a spirit of mutuality and reciprocity respecting the identity of peoples, their cultures and religions. Hence a one-sided and direct proclamation which is not dialogical and merely verbal without any involvement in the life and struggles of the people, seems to be inadequate and even obsolete.

In this new missionary era we have to critically examine our missionary motivation which needs to be purified of all elements of domination and conquest. The path of mission is the path of Jesus Christ, our Master who emptied himself (*kenosis*) without clinging to his divinity and equality with God, and became one with our humanity and died on the cross for the sake of the world. The Church has to exist for the sake of the world. The goal of the mission is not the Church but the Kingdom of God. Such a missionary Church will be only an avant-garde, a little flock, meant to be the light, salt and leaven of the world.

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Trends and Issues in Evangelization in India: Facts, Figures and Views

The Secretary of the CBCI Commission for Proclamation and Communication presents the findings of a National Survey of the Mission work of the Church in India today. The survey was conducted in 12 regions and in 35 sample dioceses and it took 3 years of serious study and research. It reveals a lot of important facts, figures, trends, issues, tensions, conflicts and crisis as well as some signs of hope. There are indeed radical changes in the missionary approach today: 84% of our missionaries are moving away from an ecclesiocentric mission to Kingdom-centred, God-centred and Christ-centred mission. The discovery of the other religions and their positive values and legitimacy seem to be the greatest revolution in the Christian mission.

"The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church" (Ad Gentes) was promulgated on December 7, 1965, as part of the process of renewal of the Church initiated by Vatican Council II (1962-65). In response to the challenges of Vatican II the Catholic Bishops Conference of India initiated a process of renewal by organizing "All India Seminar on Church in India Today" (1969) and other follow-up programmes. More than 25 years of new thinking and new approaches to evangelization and other apostolates have taken the Church in India into new directions, some expected and others unexpected. At this juncture in the history of the Church and her mission many are expressing anxieties about the new mission theologies and missionary methods. Questions are being raised:

What is happening to proclamation/mission in India?

What do the missionaries in the field think about the relationship between proclamation and dialogue; proclamation and humanization?

What new methods are initiated or emphasized by the missionaries because of the new theological orientation and directions given by the Catholic Bishops Conference of

India (CBCI) and national as well as regional mission renewal programmes etc.?

Which are the main theological/missiological trends that are being taught, published and circulated by the Indian theologians?

Really speaking nobody has relevant data and reliable information to give a rather satisfactory answer to these questions. At most some have certain opinions and hypotheses which are often contradicted by others.

Searching for answers to these questions the CBCI commission for proclamation and communication conducted a national survey of our mission work during the past three years. The study was conducted in 35 sample dioceses, in 12 ecclesiastical regions of all the three individual churches. It has made us aware of certain crisis, tensions, contradictions and opportunities in our missionary activities. The findings of the study taken together suggest that the mission of the church in India is marked by certain confusions as well as signs of hope. Our analysis is based on the data collected from 1,520 priests, 3,827 sisters and nearly 8,850 lay people. The research sample is drawn from 10% of the priests, 5% of the sisters and nearly 1% of the lay people.

I. Trends in numerical growth and spatial distribution

Christian missionaries arrived in India in different regions at different periods in history. The nature of the missionary activities and responses of the people were influenced by various powerful factors like ethnicity, caste, class, religion and culture of the people. The word of God sown in different soils naturally yielded fruits of various kinds.

The oldest Church, the Syrian Church on the Malabar coast, with its traditional claim to apostolic origin, could be called the first Church. Today they constitute nearly 62% of Kerala catholics and one fourth of India's catholic population (13,424,000). Only 6.5% of the Kerala catholics belong to the Syro-Malankara Rite. 31% of the Kerala catholics belong to the Latin Rite.

According to 1981 Census, 5.2 million Christians, out of 17.2 million Christians of India, are in Kerala. Kerala Catholics

are a little more than one third of the catholic population of India. No wonder that 50% of the Indian priests and 60% of the Indian nuns are Malayalees. They are prominent both in Church and in Society (O. Degrijse, 1984, pp. 44-46).

The Portuguese missionaries in the beginning of the 16th century, under the Padroado system, created new communities in the Western coast. The latest data shows that over 1.3 million catholics are concentrated in Bombay, Goa, Mangalore and Poona (Bombay: 5,29,801; Goa: 3,84,895; Poona: 82,418; Mangalore: 3,03,944). They constitute 10% Catholics of India and can be considered the second Church (chronologically, of course).

The third Church in India was born of the missionary enterprises, starting in the middle of the 19th century. It is constituted of the Adivasi Church in Chotanagpur and the tribal Church, mainly, though not exclusively in the North-East. Nearly 1.1 million Catholics in Chotanagpur, and neighbouring regions, gratefully recall the spiritual and social revolution initiated by Fr. Constant Lievens 110 years ago.

Today nearly 17% of the Indian Christian population is in the North East in contrast to 7% in 1951. Nearly 70% of them belong to the Baptist and the Presbyterian Churches. About one-third of the Christian population here are Catholics. In three out of seven states, the Christians are in majority: Nagaland (90%), Mizoram (83%), Meghalaya (52%), (I. Rajan, April 1989, pp. 127; F. Downs, Dec. 1981, p. 100).

The Padroado Mission under the Portuguese, in South India, (e.g. Francis Xavier) during the 16th century gained large number of converts, particularly among the fishermen on the Coromandal coast and Malabar coast. In the 17-18th century period, under the Propaganda Fide, Robert De Nobili, John De Britto and many other pioneers directed their missionary efforts to the upper castes, starting an experiment in missionary adaptation to Hindu culture, resulting in limited success both in terms of number as well as inculturation. In contrast, the work of the missionaries among Dalits won large number of believers. Today 21% of Indian Catholics are in Tamil Nadu.

Nearly 75% of the Christians in the Hindi region are converts from the Adivasis in Chotanagpur and about 20% from

the dalits. The small number of Christians from other communities found in this region are those who came here as workers and soldiers during the colonial period and they are not culturally integrated into the Local Church. 16 dioceses in North India have less than 15,000 Catholics each. In U.P., the largest state with 120 million people, including 16% Muslims, 0.15% Christian presence is like a drop in the ocean (A. Kanjamala, *Verbum SVD*, 1993, No. 1).

The Christian presence in Delhi, Chandigarh, Hariyana and Himachal Pradesh, is very insignificant. 75% of the Christians in this area, (61,000) are concentrated in Delhi, most of whom have come from South India to the capital for employment. The number of Christians in the other States are almost negligible, with a small number of converts from the tribals and the Harijans.

Jammu and Kashmir is a Muslim dominated State with 64.1% Muslims, 32.2% Hindus and 0.14% of Christians. The Christians here are a "little flock" indeed.

In 1881, only 0.7% of the Indian population was Christian and probably 90% of them were found in South India. In 1981 only 60% of the Christians are in South India; 8% in the North (Hindi Belt). 2.3% in the Western zone; 5% in the East zone, and 16.75 in the North-East region; and 3% in the extreme North. Probably there will be little change in the structure of Christian as well as Catholic population of India in the near future, with the exception of North-East India. With 2.6% of the population (Catholics constitute 1.8%) the Christians are the second minority community.

All over India numerical conversion was on regular increase for over 100 years until 1971. But conversions and baptisms are on the decline during the 1971-91 period. This phenomena coincide with the liberal missiological spirit of Vatican II, and All India Seminar on Church in India (1969); Mission Seminar in Nagpur (1971) and Patna Consultation on Evangelization (1973) and later developments. The only major exception is the North East area where the traditional mission trend is continuing, particularly in Arunachal Pradesh.

II. Institutionalization, pastoral ministry and proclamation

Institutionalization is one of the major characteristics of the Catholic Church in the post-Independence India. A large number of Church personnel are absorbed by the institutions. For example:

- During the last 4 decades dioceses have grown from 56 in 1950 to 126 in 1994.
- Dispensaries have increased to 10 fold (1469 in 1990).
- Hospitals have also increased 10 fold to reach the mark of 593 (in 1990).
- Growth rate of high schools is sixfold (2,081 in 1990).
- Colleges and institutions of higher learning have increased 8 fold (289 in 1990).
- The only exception to this trend of phenomenal growth of institutions is the field of primary and middle schools (about 25% growth). It is an indication that primary education is not a priority in many dioceses in spite of the illiteracy of many children in the area.

Not only the old Churches but also some of the new Churches are very busy and burdened with administration and pastoral ministry. Consequently they have little time, even if they wish, for Proclamation Ad Gentes.

Preoccupation with administration often diminishes the quality of Christian witness. As a consequence many Church institutions appear to the public eye as centres of power, money and prestige. Institutionalization implies the danger that the personal relation of the church to the people is diminished. It also affects the image of the church which appears too much as a powerful organisation with resources of foreign funds, which are watched with suspicion.

The mission territories of India are passing through the process of deepening the faith, and institution building, after the period of mass movement to the church. e.g. in Chotanagpur, with 9% of India's Catholics, mission Ad Gentes is not a priority as it was in the past.

Those priests and missionaries who are involved in much pastoral work have little time for evangelization. Therefore it is necessary that a few people are set apart exclusively for

proclamation. In theory, the principle that the whole church is missionary sounds attractive (AG 2). In practice this seems to be rather improbable. All don't have the charism for primary proclamation.

It is good, therefore, that each parish and each diocese set apart a particular territory for concentrated efforts to do evangelizing. The territorial concept of the mission which was abandoned in the 1974 Synod of the Bishops on Evangelization and is re-introduced in the recent encyclical (RM. 37) should further be contextualized in each diocese and each parish. India is a highly person-oriented society. Personal contacts must become an important method of evangelization and community building. With the availability of modern transport facilities contact between missionaries and the people seems to be on the decline. In the past where transport facilities were poor the missionaries moved around slowly and spent much time with the people.

Today 60% of priests, 69% of sisters and 56% of brothers are concentrated in South India where 68% of India's Catholics and only 25% of India's total population live. The rest of the mission areas suffer from shortage of personnel. During the last 15 years there is a small shift in the concentration of missionary personnel in favour of the rest of the country. That is to say in 1973, 65% of priests and 75% of sisters were working in the four Southern states. There is an overall 5% shift of missionaries in favour of other regions in India.

A major break-through in the missionary activity of the Kerala Church after II Vatican Council is the missionary movement of the Oriental Churches to North India. The Syro-Malabar Church is entrusted with eight dioceses and one eparchy in the North. Five of them are entrusted to the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (C. M. I.). The other three dioceses are entrusted to three Syrian religious congregations. The first and oldest among these is the Chanda Diocese. Conflict between Latin Catholics and Syrian hierarchy (Bishop and priests) is experienced in some of these new Syrian dioceses where a sizeable number of Latin Catholics were already existing, e. g. 75% of the Catholics in Rajkot diocese (Syrian) belonged to Latin diocese in the past.

Dissatisfaction with the administrative style prevalent in the institutional church, with the concentration of power in the hierarchy and the clergy and a lack of sufficient participation of the laity in the decision making process is growing. Many good recommendations of the All India seminar on Church in India (1969) about the participation of the laity in the parish and diocesan activities are still remaining on the shelves. The data also confirm the fact that the greater the number of the church institutions in a given area the lesser the involvement in missionary activities and vice-versa.

Distribution of Religious Personnel in Five Regions (1990)

Region	% of Catholics	% of Bishops	% of Priests	% of Brothers	% of Sisters
1. South	68.63	44.70	60.00	55.98	69.09
2. West	10.87	12.12	13.75	11.37	8.16
3. East	4.89	9.09	5.23	9.49	4.22
4. North	9.9	26.52	16.95	20.56	16.35
5. North East	5.64	7.58	3.88	2.58	2.19
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total	126,74,382	134	14,036	2,445	55,563

Source: *Mission Dynamics in India*, by A. Kanjamala, New Delhi, 1994.

Note : The CRI gives a different number of sisters. The above data is processed from *The Catholic Directory* (1990).

III. Mission Ad Gentes

During the past 200 years a good number of Hindus, Muslims and Parsis in general have said "Yes" to Jesus; but "No" to sociological conversion and visible membership in the Church. Along with the missionaries the Hindu reformers criticized the social evils prevalent in the society, e. g., Raja Ram Mohan Roy, K. C. Sen, M. C. Parekh and many others.

Hindu Fundamentalism with its philosophy of *Hindutva* is becoming stronger. The recent election trends indicate that BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) with the active collaboration of RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) has gained broad mass support. During the last 10 years the vote bank of the BJP has swollen from 7.4% in 1984

to 11.4% in 1989; and from 19.9% in 1991 to 23% in 1993. (*India Today*, July 15, 1991, pp. 40 ff).

Recently thousands of Christian tribals are reported to have reconverted to Hinduism (*India Today*, May 15, 1992). It seems to be a VHP/BJP propaganda stunt. However the Madhya Pradesh Bishops have confirmed that about 2000 Catholics have relapsed, some under fear and political pressure. Similar conversions were reported from Islam to Hinduism in Rajasthan (*Illustrated Weekly of India*, May 9-15, 1992).

The recent rise of religious fundamentalism and communalism is also characterized by an increased animosity towards the Christian missionaries. There were many incidents of burning of the churches, physical assaults on priests and sisters, attacks on christian families in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere during the year 1993. Land alienation of the tribals is another strategy of attack. Christians in some areas are living in fear and panic.

Most of our primary proclamation in the past, and to some degree at present, is to tribals and Dalits. Consequently today nearly 60% of the Indian Christians are constituted of tribals, dalits and other backward communities.

Dalit conversions are also on the decline, after the period of mass conversion. A large number of Dalit Catholics have left the church or hide their identity in public for various reasons, including socio-economic benefits from the government. Some significant differences are noticed between the social situations of the dalit christians in the north, and the south because of the presence or absence of caste christians in the region.

IV. Methods of proclamation

Under the influence of the recent movement, 'New Evangelization 2000' the proclamation of Jesus Christ and his Gospel has received a fresh impetus.

The Charismatic Retreat Movement which started in Potta, Kerala, has attracted thousands and thousands of participants. The Potta team is travelling and preaching also outside Kerala, in India and abroad. It is a powerful form of witnessing, praying and healing. Many Hindus, Muslims and people of other religions actively participate in the movement and give witness. A few also ask for Baptism.

Criticism: A few dioceses don't give entry to the team since the bishops there are suspicious of certain phenomena of charismatic movement. For instance, great emotionalism. Will this last for a long time?

Why is that the Charismatic movement is very popular and influential all over India? How is it that thousands and thousands of priests, religious, laity and people of other religions are attracted to charismatic retreats and prayers?

One of the probable answers is that the liberalism and rationalism of the post Vatican II period and the emerging consumeristic culture of the neo-rich have not satisfied many of the religious needs of the masses. Also many missionaries are experiencing a certain amount of meaninglessness and spiritual emptiness after a period of intense social action. The expected and imminent liberation and social transformation have not taken place. People are looking for religious experience which is the main feature of charismatic gatherings.

Even if the charismatic movement is short lived, as many other past religious movements, two lessons from this experience will be important. 1) God experience, and spirituality is the foundation of mission work. 2) Mission is community experience and community building. Too much individualism is the enemy of genuine mission. Emphasis on team work and community building are integral to evangelization. This might also partly explain the rapid growth and expansion of various sects in India as well as in other parts of the world.

In some places where the "School of Evangelization 2000" is conducted, some Hindus and Muslims strongly reacted to some missionaries from these schools who went about from house to house, to distribute literature and speak about Jesus.

The charismatic movement seems to be a restatement of traditional mission and proclamation. Will it lead to fundamentalism in the sensitive and fundamentalistic ethos of present day India?

Proclamation through mass media: UNDA/OCIC India has over 100 members. Out of these around 40 communication centres are working rather efficiently. Around 65% of the communication centres and trained personnel are in South India. In the north where the need is more, only very few centres are

founded and functioning well. "Radio Veritas" and "Radio Sri Lanka" are well received by the listeners in India. According to the organizers the Indian financial contribution towards the self-sufficiency programme of Radio Veritas is unsatisfactory.

Catholic Information/enquiry Centres: There are 35 centres, half of which are in South India. Why only a few centres in the North? Till 1985, on the average 40-50 thousand enquiries were made to these centres per year. On the average around 30 adult conversions per year from these centres are reported. In recent years the number of enquiries have not increased. In 1991 there were 43,432 enquiries out of which 61% were in South India and 20.6% were in the Hindi belt (North). For many educated non-Christians, because of the reactions from their families, postal correspondence is a good method to deepen their knowledge of Christ.

The Vatican Council and the Post-Council social encyclicals legitimized the church's responsibility for all the spheres of human life: social, economic, cultural, religious and political. Many young missionaries entered into radical social action for the transformation of the unjust structures. Radical commitment to the poor and social justice has created some kind of a polarization between the spiritual and the social mission of the church in many dioceses. However, with the decline of communism/socialism in U. S. S. R. and elsewhere, there is a decline in the radical mission approaches of 1975-1985. The beginning of a return to institutionalized mission is being observed. e. g. setting up more English medium schools, even in rural areas at the insistence of the so called poor.

Missionaries in general spend not much time for collective reflection on their mission theology, mission methods and life style. There seems to be a lot of action without adequate reflection and prayer. However to those who live in communities a better opportunity for these exercises are provided.

V. Mission theology

There are significant differences of opinion about the purpose of missionary activity. While vast majority of priests and sisters (84%) are gradually moving away from the traditional ecclesio-centric approach to the mission, others in general seem to be closer to the traditional position. Such a difference is one

of the sources of tensions and even conflicts. The problem of conflicting perceptions is exacerbated by the fact that there are significant regional differences in the perception of the source of salvation as well as the purpose of mission.

The most powerful traditional motivation of mission — salvation of souls — is weakened by the new theology which affirms that salvation is possible in one's own religion (NA 1; AG 2; LG 8; GS 22). About 66% of the clergy and 74% of religious sisters maintain that all religions are means of salvation for their sincere followers. In contrast only 16% of the priests and religious sisters and majority of the lay people (58%) subscribe to the traditional view that there is no salvation outside the boundaries of the visible church.

With the legitimization of dialogue (a) Dialogue with the great religious traditions of the people of Asia; (b) Dialogue with the poor, the deprived and the oppressed; (c) Dialogue with living traditions, the cultures and with the life realities of the people in whose midst we serve, (FABC, Taipei, 1974, No. 9-24); and work of liberation as constitutive dimensions of mission (Synod of Bishops, on justice in the world, 1971, No. 6) missionary emphasis has shifted to witness, presence, and service, particularly among the poor and oppressed.

Among the three models of evangelization (Church-centred, Christ-centred, Kingdom of God centred), Christ-centred is the most powerful motivation of missionaries. Around 70% of the missionaries on all India level consider that making Christ known is their first priority.

The second priority of the Indian missionaries is the promotion of the values of the Kingdom of God (65%). The link between these two is clear to most of the respondents. The Vatican Council's teaching that God's saving love extends to all people has been accepted by the majority of respondents.

On the national level Church-centred mission gets the third priority. Only 16% of the missionaries, priests and sisters, are considering this as their first priority. The main exception to this trend is the North-East where Church-centred mission gets a higher rating (36%).

In the north-east conversions among the tribals continue. During the last 30 years the Catholic population increased from

60,000 to 7.1 lakh (12 fold increase). The contribution of the Christian mission towards the transformation of the tribal society in the North-East is uncontestable. However, the quality of their life and Christian witness has yet to develop.

In Arunachal Pradesh, in spite of official opposition from the government, about 10,000 people join the Church per year; nearly half of them enter the Catholic Church. No priest or religious is allowed to stay here. Therefore, the laity is actively involved in evangelization. It seems that where the clerics are in big number, the laity have less opportunity for missionary involvement. New charismatic movement is partly a reaction to institutionalization/clericalization. Such sects are becoming very attractive especially in those areas where the Church is highly organized.

Decline in ecclesio-centrism implies also a change in the traditional ecclesiology and attitudes to Church authorities. e.g. bishops and priests. Naturally there are reactions to these new trends.

VI. Tensions, conflicts and crisis in the mission

Interest in direct proclamation of Jesus and his Gospel seems to be on the decline in general (R. M. 2). Findings of our survey in various dioceses support this view. On All India level only 33% of the missionaries are happy with the missionary atmosphere in their dioceses. However, a higher level of satisfaction was expressed in Chotanagpur (45% of the priests and 36% of the sisters) and in the North-East (56% of the priests and 79% of the sisters).

The decline in the missionary spirit is due to various factors. However, "The dampening of missionary zeal is due ultimately ... to the fact that the power of the Word is choked by the cares of the world and the delight in riches (Mt. 13:32) that is, by consumerism and the lure of power and money among those who should be servants of the Word" (*Paths of Mission in India Today*, No. 49). "The renewal of the missionary spirit will depend on a renewed life of faith in Jesus Christ."

The President of the Vatican Secretariate for Evangelization in his address to the Cardinals in Rome, on 4-5 April 1991,

accused India as the epicentre of new heresies. The emerging mission theology of India is also much suspected by some members of the hierarchy of India. Chapter three of the recent mission encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* was indirectly answering missiological issues raised by the Indian theologians.

With the Post Vatican new theology of the local Church (AG: 30) bishop is the final authority, responsible for mission in his territory. If he is not seriously interested, there is no organization in India with a common vision and coordinating authority to direct the work of proclamation. The traditional role of *Propaganda Fide* to coordinate missionary activities in the so-called mission territories is taken away by the new laws and this role is not officially replaced by any corresponding body in India. We are in a state of fragmentation. Since the CBCI Commission for Proclamation has no legal authority, who will coordinate the work of Proclamation at the all India level? Evangelization is the only issue which can unite the church in India. The missionary work is recently divided on the basis of the three ritual churches.

Rite conflicts seem to be a major issue in the mission. Instead of being a sign of unity, it is a sign of division. Proclamation of Jesus is at cross roads. Many priests and lay people are losing faith in the leadership of certain Bishops whose credibility is at stake due to rite tensions (See the letter of admonition from Rome in November 1993).

Serious tensions between the pre-Vatican and post-Vatican II theology of mission are observed in many dioceses. This is one of the major sources of personnel conflicts, for example between Bishops and missionaries; between old priests and young priests; between Rome and local church.

Because of the prolonged tensions and conflicts between some bishops and missionaries on account of the serious differences of mission theology and mission methods about 10% of priests and sisters in a few dioceses resigned from their priesthood and religious life. (Of course this might not have been the only reason). This is a clear indication of serious frustrations of not only those who left, but also those who continue to be part of the system.

A good number of missionaries, particularly in the Hindi belt with poor response to the Gospel, feel frustrated. Opportunities for pastoral work are minimum. Social action for the poor or English Medium School for the rich are two main fields of commitment.

A close affinity between the prevailing mission theology and the response/non-response of the people, is noted: e. g. Church centred missionary approach is the lowest in the Hindi Belt (with the exception of tribal areas), and relatively high in the North-East.

India is a highly person-oriented society. Personal contact must become an important method of evangelization. With the availability of modern transport facilities the contact between missionaries and the people are on the decline.

The future of the mission will depend to a considerable degree on the committed laity who are in a better position to influence every sphere of society with the values of the Gospel. In spite of the theology of 'The People of God' (LG), the style of exercising authority in the old churches seems to be non-participatory. Often the quality of human relations does not inspire genuine confidence in the leadership nor is it favourable for building communities.

Organizations like the CBCI as well as some of the dioceses are like huge animals unable to move fast or adapt itself to survive in a rapidly changing environment. In the place of slow moving hierarchical system we need slim and agile organizations that can move fast and respond creatively.

Most dangerous socio-political phenomena in India today are: a) Communalism/fundamentalism; b) Crime and violence particularly against the Scheduled Castes and Tribes; c) Corruption in public life; d) Consumerism among the elite and neo-rich whose values are fast declining.

Regionalism/ethnocentrism in the Church and mission is on the increase. e. g. Dalit conflicts, tribal reawakening, rite conflicts, tension between the missionaries from the South and the indigenous people in the North. The catholicity and universality of the mission is in danger. Where are the charismatic leaders in the Church and mission whose visions transcend tribe, rite and linguistic interests?

VII. Signs of hope

However the post-Vatican transitional period is also characterized by signs of hope. For nearly two-thirds of the missionaries the priority in the mission is to make Jesus Christ known as the source of missionary motivation and to work for the realization of the values of the kingdom of God. Openness to other religions and cultures, in contrast to the closed mentality of the colonial period, is on the increase and it reduces the social distance and conflicts between Christian mission and people of other religions. Around 20% of the priests and sisters either organized or participated in inter-religious dialogue and prayer during the past one year. However, its practice is not very significant except for the dialogue meetings mostly among the educated urban elites.

The radical commitment of some missionaries to the poor and the oppressed, moved by the spirit of compassion and service, and without any ulterior motives of conversion, is another trend and it weakens the accusations from some quarters of the hidden agenda of the missionaries. Simultaneously it is an area of serious conflicts in some dioceses. Instances of incongruity between the theological perception of the missionaries on the one hand and their actual practices on the other become more clear through the survey.

The following are some of the major social trends in India which the missionaries are setting or following: a) Dalit liberation movement; b) Tribal liberation movement; c) Women's liberation; d) Environmental protection. The Gospel is preached to the poor and the marginalized (LK: 4: 18). The missionaries can be proud that they have made some contribution to restore dignity to those who were suffering the pain and agony of dehumanization for centuries. The people of the "little traditions" are given a new identity.

Further the survey shows, by comparison with priests, the religious sisters manifest more missionary involvement through their non-institutional forms of ministries, and outreach programmes. Sisters are showing more interest in family visits. Their contact and involvement in non-institutional ministry is 3 to 4 times more than that of priests. A much higher percentage of sisters speak about the love of Christ to their students

in schools, to the patients in hospitals and dispensaries as well as informal settings. The mission of the future will not be as sacrament-oriented as in the past, for example, baptisms, holy masses, confessions etc. The future of the mission in India will be considerably shaped by the life, commitment and work of sisters and lay people.

In this context frequent transfers of sisters from one State to another or from one cultural zone to another cultural zone weaken their commitment and relation to the people. The Indian society functions more at affective level than at rational level. The transfer of bishops also might create similar problems, including poor loyalty from the priests.

The number of those who adopt new and creative forms of missionary methods is on the increase. Our study of 30 Catholic Enquiry Centres shows that 40-50 thousand adults of other religions are searching to deepen their knowledge of Jesus Christ through correspondence courses. Around 1,500 letters received annually from listeners of the Hindi programme of Radio Veritas, Manila, indicate that large numbers of people of all religions are listening to the Gospel of Christ regularly. The charismatic retreat movement and their large conventions in India are occasions of proclamation and witnessing. These are attended by large number of christians as well as people of other faiths.

It is heartening to note that, following the directions of Vatican Council II, the number of those who study and pray the Word of God in families and small Christian communities is on the increase.

The number of Indian missionaries going to foreign mission is on the increase. Accurate data about them is not yet available. Most of the missionaries are going to African countries and to South America. All these and many other developments not reported here, are signs of hope.

VIII. Conclusion

97% of Indians are finding their salvation and God without any direct contact with the Christian mission. Mission theology and missionary methods are undergoing radical changes in India.

The most radical missiological change for the last 100 years is the relegation of the Church-centred mission, i.e.,

conversion to the visible Church, as the top priority at the beginning of this century, to the third place at the end of the century.

From the analysis of the data it becomes rather clear that the vast majority of the priests and sisters (84%), with minor regional variations, are gradually moving away from the traditional Ecclesio-centric idea of mission, and are coming closer to the Christo-centric mission and Theo-centric mission which are intimately and mutually linked. The views, attitudes and methods of the Indian missionaries are closer to the positions of Pope Paul VI in *The Evangelization in the Modern World* (EN) than the stand taken by Pope John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio*.

Therefore the recent National Consultation on Mission in Pune in January 1994, rightly concluded "Proclamation, dialogue, liberation, concern and commitment for the integrity of creation and evangelization of culture are integral parts of the mission of the Church. They constitute various parts of the one and the same mission. The context of the land and the people will call for a variety of paths to be followed by the Church" (*Paths of the Mission in India*, No. 51).

For Christians, particularly for the missionaries, the greatest religious revolution of this century is the discovery of other spiritual worlds, with their coherent meaning systems. Recognition of these religions, with positive attitudes of openness and programmes of dialogue and partnership, in contrast to the closed and aggressive approach of the past mission, has laid the foundation for building a new civilization of Brotherhood and Sisterhood. A new awareness is being fostered that we all, belonging to different religions, cultures, castes, tribes, and nations are children of One God — our creator/our father/our mother. We are all related to one another as members of one human family. We are entering the age of mutual mission.

Appendix

Number and Percentage of Christians in India 1951-81

	1951		1961		1971		1981	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Cultural Zones & States								
1. South Zone								
A. P.	1232621	(3.96)	1428729	(3.97)	1823436	(4.19)	1433327	(2.67)
Karnataka	418453	(2.15)	487587	(2.06)	613026	(02.09)	764449	(2.05)
Kerala	2825720	(20.85)	3587365	(21.22)	4494089	(21.05)	5233865	(20.56)
Tamilnadu	1427382	(4.73)	1762954	(5.22)	2367749	(5.74)	2798048	(5.78)
Pondicherry	.....	.....	33946	(9.19)	41296	(8.75)	49914	(8.25)
Lakshadweep	2	(0.01)	56	(0.23)	239	(0.75)	266	(0.66)
% of the region in the country	5904178	(70.34)	7300637	(68.08)	9339835	(65.67)	10279869	(60.00)
2. West Zone								
Goa, Daman & Diu	233493	(39.15)	227202	(36.25)	272509	(31.76)	318249	(29.28)
Gujarat	78026	(0.48)	91028	(0.44)	109341	(0.41)	132703	(0.38)
Maharashtra	433290	(1.35)	560594	(1.41)	717174	(1.42)	795464	(1.26)
Dadar & Nagar Haveli	870	(2.09)	799	(1.73)	1918	(2.58)	2025	(1.95)
% of the region in the country	745589	(8.88)	879623	(8.20)	1100942	(7.74)	1248441	(7.23)

Cultural Zones & States	1951		1961		1971		1981	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
3, Eastern Region								
Orissa	141934 (0.96)		201017 (1.14)		378888 (1.72)		480426 (1.82)	
West Bengal	181775 (0.69)		204530 (0.58)		252752 (0.56)		319670 (0.58)	
Andaman & Nicobar Is.	9494 (30.65)		17973 (28.28)		30342 (26.35)		48274 (25.57)	
% of the region in the country	333203 (3.96)		423520 (3.95)		661982 (4.65)		848370 (4.92)	
4, Northern Region								
(Hindi Belt, Gangetic Plain)								
a) Bihar	415548 (1.07)		502195 (1.08)		658717 (1.16)		740186 (1.05)	
M. P.	81004 (0.31)		188314 (0.58)		286072 (0.68)		354972 (0.67)	
Rajasthan	11421 (0.07)		22864 (0.11)		30202 (0.11)		39568 (0.11)	
U. P.	123876 (0.19)		101641 (0.13)		131810 (0.14)		162199 (0.14)	
% of the region in the country	631849 (7.52)		815014 (7.60)		1106801 (7.78)		1296925 (7.52)	
b) Delhi (UT)	18685 (1.07)		29269 (1.10)		43720 (1.07)		61609 (0.99)	
Chandigarh (U. T.)	575 (1.07)		867 (0.72)		2504 (0.97)		4470 (0.93)	
Haryana	4317 (0.07)		7378 (0.09)		9802 (0.09)		12215 (0.09)	
Himachal Pradesh	2171 (0.89)		3274 (0.11)		3556 (0.10)		3954 (0.09)	
% of the region in the country	25748 (0.31)		40788 (0.38)		59582 (0.42)		82248 (0.47)	

Cultural Zones & States	1951		1961		1971		1981	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
5. <i>Extreme North</i>								
Jammu & Kashmir	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	7015 (0.14)	
Punjab	9212 (1.00)		138907 (1.24)		162202 (1.19)		184934 (1.12)	
% of the region	9212 (0.11)		138907 (1.30)		162202 (1.14)		191949 (3.12)	
in the country							(1971 Census)	
6. <i>North East</i>								
Assam	337953 (4.10)		493641 (4.44)		667151 (4.46)		667151 (4.46)	
Arunachal Pradesh	.....	.....	.....	.....	364 (0.74)		27306 (4.32)	
Manipur	63694 (11.84)		152043 (19.49)		279243 (26.03)		421702 (29.67)	
Meghalaya	149378 (22.66)		270912 (35.21)		475267 (46.97)		702854 (52.61)	
Mizoram	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....		413818 (83.81)	
Nagaland	98068 (46.04)		195588 (52.97)		344798 (66.76)		621590 (80.21)	
Sikkim	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....		7015 (2.21)	
Tripura	5262 (0.82)		10039 (0.87)		15718 (1.01)		24872 (1.21)	
% of the region								
in the country	654355 (7.80)		1122223 (10.47)		1782541 (12.53)		2886308 (16.74)	
Total India's								
Christians	8393734 (2.35)		10723560 (2.44)		14223382 (2.60)		17246416 (2.53)	
Total India's								
Population	357153382 (100%)		439451489 (100%)		547031272 (100%)		681643043 (100%)	

Source: Data reorganized by the author from

1. I. Rajan "Demographic Profile of Indian Christians: An Over view" In *Indian Missiological Review*, Vol. II, No. 2, 1989. p. 123.
2. *Census of India, 1981*, "Household Population by Religion of head of Household, paper 3 of 1984, series I.
3. Augustine Kanjamala, (Ed) *Mission Dynamics in India*, New Delhi, 1994.

The Church as Mission

A Reflection on Mt. 5:13-16

The so called Great Commission (Mt. 28:16-20) which concludes the Gospel of Matthew has become a foundational text for the aggressive missiology underlying new evangelical movements in the sects and main line churches. But to be properly understood the text is to be read in its setting in the gospel of Matthew and particularly in the light of another, largely neglected mission command (Mt. 5:13-16) which Matthew has inserted at a crucial point in the Sermon on the Mount. Reflection on this text offers a corrective to a flawed understanding of the so-called Great Commission and draws attention to forgotten dimensions of mission which are of particular relevance to the church in India. Mission, the text reminds us, is not just Christocentric (making disciples of the risen Lord) but theocentric (giving glory to God by building up God's Kingdom); and the way to this mission is not so much individual proclamation as community witness. Unless the church lives as church, that is, as the symbol and servant of the Kingdom it cannot engage in authentic mission.

For Christians interested in mission the Gospel of Matthew is significant primarily for its so called 'Great Commission' (Mt. 28:16-20), which is probably the most used and abused mission text in recent times.¹ This marvellous finale to what is arguably the most meticulously constructed of the New Testament writings (Matthew) offers a summary of the gospel in a carefully crafted composition, whose theological density rivals that of the prologue of John. The text is therefore to be read as part of the gospel it so brilliantly concludes. Instead, it is (especially in evangelical tracts) often taken out of its context, and read as an autonomous decree which speaks directly to our own situation. An editorial masterpiece which weaves together the

1 For a near-exhaustive survey of the previous exegesis of this much studied text see Gerhard Friederich, "Die formale Struktur von Mt. 28, 18-20", *ZTK* 80 (1983) 137-83. The missiological significance of the text is discussed

christological (28:18), ecclesiological (28:19-20a), and eschatological threads (28:20b) of the gospel into a theological text of great power, is now read as a simple (even simplistic) 'Great Commission', purporting to come from Jesus himself.²

Such a reading of the text is based on questionable exegesis and can lead to a damaging missiology. It is based on questionable exegesis because it ignores the results of the critical study of the gospels, which has shown convincingly that Mt. 28:16-20, as it now stands, is a composition of the evangelist, not a saying of Jesus, and does not encourage the simplistic aggressive proselytizing often derived from it.³ It can lead to a damaging missiology because it gives rise to a distorted understanding of the practice of mission. Mission is no longer understood as the spontaneous and joyous communication of the experience of the risen Lord, as it always is in the New Testament.⁴ It is now looked upon as a 'duty' to be imposed on a reluctant people, who, because they have not been fired by the spirit of Jesus, must be prodded to proclaim 'the good news' through guilt. Mission thus becomes not gospel but law.

Worse still, a mission fuelled by such triumphalistic 'commands' easily degenerates into a 'conquest' (with or without a 'holy alliances' with aggressive colonial or neo-colonial powers),

in David Bosch, *Transforming Mission Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1991) 56-83; Lucien Legrand, *Unity and Plurality: Mission in the Bible* (New York: Orbis 1990) 77-82; Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmuehler, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (London: SCM, 1983) 251-52; George Soares-Prabhu, "Following Jesus in Mission: Reflections on Mission in the Gospel of Matthew", in J. Kavunkal & F. Hrangkhuma (eds.) *Bible and Mission in India* (Bombay: St. Paul's 1993) 64-92 (65-73).

2 Cf. Roger Hedlund, *Mission to Man in the Bible* (Madras: Evangelical Literature Service, 1983) 202-206; Alan Tippet, *An Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1987) 14; Max Warren, *I Believe in the Great Commission* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1976) 54-55.

3 Soares-Prabhu (n. 1 above) 65-73; Bosch (n. 1 above) 56-57; Legrand (n. 1 above) 82-83.

4 The variant 'mission commands' of the Risen Lord described by Matthew (28:16-20), Luke (22: 44-49) and John (20: 21-23) — the mission command in Mark (16: 9-20) is not part of the original gospel — are redactional formulations which express in terms of the theology of each evangelist an essential but unthematized dimension of the Easter experience — see Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Resurrection and the Easter Message* (New York: Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1971) 80-88.

where the numerical expansion of the missionizing church or the political or economic advancement of its patrons can become more important than the welfare of the 'evangelized' people. Mission then ceases to be an act of service and becomes, a selfish and therefore sinful exercise of institutional survival, expansion or power. The consequences of this are plain for any one who cares to reflect on what five hundred years of the colonial mission have done to the Third World, or on the panic reactions that Christian missions still evoke in India.⁵

A corrective to this understanding of mission can be found in another mission text in the gospel of Matthew (Mt 5:13-16), whose significance for the New Testament theology of mission has been largely overlooked. This text gives us an understanding of mission which complements that offered by the Great Commission. In it mission is described not so much in terms of verbal proclamation as of witness. Such a description, I hope to show, is not only more appropriate to the post-colonial situation of India today, but also truer to the New Testament understanding of mission, than is the narrow, one-sided proclamation missiology derived from the Great Commission. For mission, as the New Testament understands it, is always *integral mission*.⁶ It includes not only verbal proclamation but healing action as well (Mt 4:23=9:35); and it strives not just for 'church growth' (as if the church were an end in itself) but for the wholeness of creation, that is, for the total and integral liberation of human and cosmic history into the fulness of the eschatological Kingdom (Mt 10:7). These dimensions of mission form the backdrop to all the mission texts of the new Testament. They find a conspicuous expression in the other mission command of Matthew's gospel,

5 Cf. the issue of *Concilium* 1990/6 on 1432-1992: *The Voices of the Victims* ed. L. Boff & V. Elizondo; of *Missiology* 29/2 (1992) on *Columbus and the New World: Evangelization or Invasion?* of *Social Action* 42/1 (1992) on *Christopher Columbus: Five Centuries of Colonialism* for some of the ambiguities of colonial mission in Latin America; and Arun Shourie, *Missionaries in India Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas* (Delhi: ASA Publications, 1994), along with the critical review of Kushwant Singh in *The Week*, 12/25 (12-6-1994) 20-21, for an instructive glimpse into the continuing widespread Hindu prejudices about Christian missions in India.

6 See Aloysius Pieris. "Whither New Evangelism?", *EAPR* 29 (1992) 270-82, for a splendid exposition of how 'integral evangelization' is to be understood in Asia today.

the mission command of the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:13-16), which though less known is probably richer in its overall, missiological content than the much quoted 'Great Commission' (Mt 28:16-20). It is this mission command that I propose to study here hoping to find in it an appropriate starting point for a reflection on mission in India today.

1. The Setting of Mt 5:13-16

Mt 5:13-16 is part, indeed a crucial part, of the Sermon on the Mount, the first and most important of the five discourses (Mt 5-7; 10; 13; 18; (23)24-25) which form the structural backbone of Matthew's gospel. This inaugural discourse gives us a sort of compendium of Christian life. It does this not in the form of a set of rules which are to be rigorously observed (the Sermon on the Mount is no way Canon Law!), but as a series of 'goal directive norms'⁷, illustrated by 'focal instances',⁸ which together indicate the attitude of radical obedience and radical concern which a follower of Jesus must develop.⁹ The attitude demanded by the Sermon on the Mount is, however, not merely an inner disposition but an attitude of effective love (*agape*), which shows itself in 'doing good to' anyone in need (Mt. 5:45; 1Thess 5:15). Like the rest of the gospel the Sermon is strongly oriented towards "doing" (7:21-27).

This 'doing' which the Sermon recommends is not, formally, missionary praxis. Matthew, who has arranged the sayings of Jesus into discourses theme-wise, has kept his instructions for mission in the Mission Discourse of Mt 10. But because mission is an essential dimension of discipleship for Matthew, the whole praxis of the Sermon on the Mount is in fact oriented towards mission.

This orientation is given by Mt 5:13-16, a link text which joins the solemn and joyous opening of the Sermon (the beatitudes of Mt 5:3-12) to the definition of its theme (the I-saying of Mt. 5:17-20). The beatitudes form a kind of overture to the Sermon.

7 Bernard Haering, "The Normative Value of the Sermon on the Mount" *CBCQ* 29 (1967) 375-85.

8 R. C. Tannehill, "The 'Focal Instance' as a Form of New Testament Speech: A Study of Mt 5:39b-42", *Journal of Religion* 50 (1970) 372-85.

9 George Soares-Prabhu, "The Dharma of Jesus: An Interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount", *Bible Bhashyam* 6 (1980) 378-81.

They offer as it were a preliminary outline of Christian life whose details will be filled out by what follows. The I-saying, on the other hand, defines the purpose of the Sermon. The Sermon, it tells us, is meant to 'fulfil' the economy of the First Testament by proposing a form of righteousness (Christian *dharma*) which is better than that practised by the religious leaders of traditional Judaism, the learned scribes and the pious pharisees (5:20). The 'mission command' (5:13-16), which comes in between the two, gives the whole Sermon a missionary orientation, by pointing out the effect that living out the Sermon will have on the liberation of the world. If the beatitudes tell us the 'how' of Christian *dharma* (how Christian life is to be lived) the I-saying tells us its 'what' (namely, that Christian *dharma* is the 'fulfilment of the Law'), and the mission command tells us its 'why', (showing us that living out this *dharma* is significant for the liberation of the world). The beatitudes (5:1-12) are thus addressed strictly to the followers of Jesus; the I-saying (5:17-20) relates their following to the religiosity of the Jews; the mission command of the Sermon (5:13-16) relates it to the salvation of the world.

BEATITUDES (5:3-12)	MISSION COMMAND (5:13-16)	I-SAYING (5:17-20)
How	Why	What
	of Christian Dharma	
(Xtians)	(world)	(Jews)

2. The Meaning of Mt 5:13-16

This crucial mission command of the Sermon on the Mount is a carefully composed text which reads as follows:

Mt 5:13-16

13 You are the salt of the earth.

but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?
It is no longer good for anything,
but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

14 You are the light of the world.

A city built on a hill cannot be hid,

- 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel¹ basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.
- 16 In the same way, **let your light shine** before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

It is only the last verse (v. 16) of this carefully structured text with its lone imperative ("let your light shine") which, strictly speaking, is a 'mission command'. But this verse concludes the whole preceding section (5:13-15). It rounds it off and gives it its orientation. It is, as Ulrich Luz comments "the summarizing key of the pericope."¹⁰ The whole pericope has been shaped by Matthew, from originally independent sayings,¹¹ into a coherent, closely knit unit which comes to its point in v. 16. The pericope as a whole, then, is to be taken as a 'mission command', in which vv. 13-15 motivate the command while v. 16 articulates it.

The mission command makes two striking assertions about the followers of Jesus. "You are the salt of the earth", it says, and "you are the light of the world." These terse indicatives, remarkable in themselves, become all the more striking in their context. The "you" in them which is emphatic ('*You* are...') links them to the verses that precede (5:11-12), in which the third person of Matthew's first eight beatitudes ("Blessed are the..." in 5:3-10) changes suddenly into the second person ("Blessed are you..." in 5:11-12). It is this 'you' of the ninth beatitude, that is, the followers of Jesus, blessed because they are persecuted, slandered and reviled, who are now declared to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The assertions of 5:13-16 are, then as Davies and Allison note, "strikingly paradoxical", because they claim that "the world is saved precisely by those it persecutes."¹²

The claim made in these assertions is even more striking. The persecuted followers of Jesus are said to be "the salt of the earth" and the "light of the world". Images, which in the Bible are usually reserved for the Torah, or for Israel, or for the Messiah, are now applied to these reviled and persecuted

10 Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, Augsburg, 1989) 252

11 W. D. Davies & Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Volume I (ICC) (Edinburg: Clark, 1988) 470-71.

12 Ibid, 472

followers of Jesus. And they are applied in the most universal way possible: the followers of Jesus are to be the salt and the light not just of Israel but of the world.¹³

Salt and light are images widely used in the ancient world, and can mean many things.¹⁴ They are open symbols, that is they are images whose meaning is not fixed but is determined by the context in which they are used. But the context in Mt 5:13-16 does not make it clear what exactly these two images signify. It does not tell us what precise function of the Christian community is being indicated by them. Indeed it is likely that Matthew is not thinking of any very specific function, but is merely drawing our attention to the indispensable role the followers of Jesus are to play in the liberation of the world. How they are to play this role, is made clear in the concluding verse of the pericope, which, as we have seen is its "summarizing key"¹⁵. Here we are told what it means in practice to be salt and light.

Because they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world the followers of Jesus must let their light shine before others. That is, they are "to live in the world so that the world will see them and be moved to glorify God"¹⁶. To do this they have not to practise ostentatious displays of piety (this is explicitly forbidden by Jesus in Mt 6:1-19), but must simply do the 'good works'

13 Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthaeus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1972) 136; Luz, (n. 10 above) 249; Davies & Allison (n. 11 above) 472.

14 See Davies & Allison (n. 11 above) 472-73 for an excellent survey of the symbolic use of salt in the Old and New Testaments, in rabbinic texts and in Greek literature. Three usages of salt stand out: 1) Its use in daily life to flavour or preserve food (Job 6:6); 2) Its use in cult as an element added to purify sacrifices (Ex 30:35; Ezek 43:24); and 3) its use in religious and social life to seal a relationship with God (Num 18:19— a covenant of salt) or with people (Ezra 4:14). Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 75, speaks of the use of salt in small quantities as fertilizer for the soil, but this use is not attested to in contemporary writings and is questioned by Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthaeus* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962) 99. Davies & Allison (n. 11 above) 473, rightly point out that no particular usage of salt is singled out by Matthew for whom salt was "probably equivocal and multivocal" and "not to be delimited to any particular referent"

15 Luz, (n. 10 above) 252.

16 Davies & Allison (n. 11 above) 478.

that will be spelled out for them in the Sermon on the Mount. Merely doing this, that is merely living out their Christian *dharma* is an act of mission, because it will lead people to glorify God. The goal of mission, as spelled out in the mission command of the Sermon on the Mount, is therefore, to lead people to give glory to God; the means to this goal is to live out one's Christian life; the way to live out one's Christian life is to follow the Sermon on the Mount. Because living out Christian life properly is already mission, the Sermon on the Mount, which marks out the contours of Christian living, becomes a strategy for mission!

3. The Significance of Mt 5:13-16

Several important truths about church and mission emerge when we begin to reflect on what has been said about this mission command and its setting.

a) The Sermon on the Mount is addressed not to any special group among the followers of Jesus, but to all his followers. Ulrich Luz has argued this well¹⁷. But what Luz and indeed most other commentators seem to have missed is that Matthew visualizes these followers of Jesus not as a collection of individuals but as a 'church' (16:18; 18:17). The individualism of our modern or post-modern culture blinds us to the essentially communitarian perspective of Matthew, for whom the followers of Jesus form a structured community and are usually thought of as such¹⁸. The mission command of 5:13-16, like the so called Great Commission of 28:16-20, is therefore addressed not just to individual followers of Jesus, but to the Christian community as a whole. It is this community which is hailed as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and which is summoned to let its light shine before people, so that they will be led to glorify God. The 'good works' taught by the Sermon on the Mount as exemplifications of the selfless love which is basic attitude of Christian life (22:34-40) are to be made visible in the praxis of the community as a whole, and not just of a

17 Luz (n. 10 above) 254-55.

18 We must not of course read our modern experience of a highly institutionalized and stratified 'church', into Matthew. A useful discussion of the 'church' in Matthew in terms of the Hellenistic institution of the household can be found in Michael H. Crosby, *House of Disciples: Church, Economics and Justice in Matthew* (NY: Orbis, 1988).

Mother Theresa in it. Called for a mission to the world, the church must fulfil this mission, first of all, by living visibly as church. And a community becomes 'church' not simply by professing faith in Jesus (saying "Lord, Lord"), but by *doing* the will of the Father, as this is expressed in the Sermon on the Mount and the other teachings of Jesus (Mt. 7:21-23).

b) The ultimate basis of the church's mission is therefore the witness of its community life and praxis. It is through its fidelity to the Christian *dharma*, with its anti-greed and its anti-pride¹⁹, that the church remains 'salt' that has not lost its saltiness and 'light' that has not been hidden under a bushel (5:14-15). Because mission is a communication of life (of 'saltiness' or 'light'), and not merely enrolment into a club or conscription into an army, it must emerge spontaneously from the life of a witnessing community, and spread as it were by infection. Any verbal proclamation if it is to be authentic and not a form of what Matthew (and Jesus) would call 'hypocrisy' (Mt. 7:5; 15:7), must first be lived out in the Christian life of the community. A church that does not live a conspicuously Christian life (a church, for instance that is ridden by caste, or devoured by consumerism, or caught up in struggles for status or power) can no more engage in authentic mission than can a bad tree produce healthy fruit (Mt. 3:8-10; 7:16-20; 12:33). Its mission sours into 'conquest', propaganda, or 'church growth'; and the communities it engenders are not spirit filled churches but infected reproductions of itself.

c) So while verbal proclamation must be a part of Christian mission, it will always be a derivative part. This is especially so in India. For here a religious tradition that 'sees the divine image' (*darshan*)²⁰ rather than 'hears the word of God' has made people more sensitive to visual manifestations of religious experience in the life of individuals and communities,

19 See George Soares-Prabhu, "Anti-Greed and Anti-Pride, Mark 10: 17-27 & 10 35-45 in the Light of Tribal Values". *Jeevadhara* 24/140 (1994) 130-50 (sp. 149-50), and compare this with the two axioms, 1) the irreconcilable opposition between Yhwh and Mammon and 2) the irrevocable covenant between Yhwh and the poor, which Pieris (n. 6 above) 274-75 proposes as the basis of Christian life and mission.

20 Diana L. Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1981)

than to mere words about it. It is the witness of individual and communitarian life, as the lives of our Indian saints have shown, that is crucial. We need to listen attentively to Mahatma Gandhi's words about "the gospel of the rose"²¹.

d) Genuine mission, flowing out of the living praxis of the church, the mission command tells us, will lead people to give glory to God (5:16). The mission command of the Sermon on the Mount is thus strongly theocentric — not ecclesiocentric nor even Christocentric as is for instance the Great Commission. Because the ultimate manifestation of the glory of God is God's reign (Mt. 6:9-10), one might argue that the ultimate aim of mission, implied in this text and spelled out elsewhere in the Bible, is the building up of the reign of God. Mission does this whenever it contributes to the realization of God's plan for human and cosmic liberation (paradigmed in the confessional history of the Bible), whereby the 'heavens and the earth' created in the beginning (Gen 1-2) are brought through a long process of struggle against the powers of sin and death, to their fullness in the new heavens and the new earth, which will appear at the end-time (Rev 21:1-4). The aim of mission is, therefore, not so much planting (or more accurately transplanting) the church, nor conquering of the world for Christ, nor fostering church growth, as leading history to its fulfilment in the full realization of the Kingdom of God.

e) This understanding of mission is, I believe, specially appropriate in India today. Because of its pluri-religious horizon, an Indian missiology will tend, like all Indian theology, to be centred on God rather than on the church or even on Christ. Such a theocentric focus, is nothing to be embarrassed about, for it is completely faithful to the Bible. The biblical story begins and ends not with the church nor even with Jesus Christ but only with God who is all in all (Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6). It may be the task of an Indian theology to restore this theocentric focus to a Western Christianity, which, because it tends to stop short at Jesus (who is the way not the goal); or, worse, because it tends to sacralize the church (which is a symbol and

²¹ M. K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions: Their Place in India*, ed. Bharatan Kumarappa (Ahmedabad: Navjivan 1957) 162

the servant of the Kingdom, but not the Kingdom itself)²², may have lost its sense of the overwhelming reality of God.

f) Reflection on the mission command of the Sermon on the Mount thus offers a double corrective to current understandings of church and mission. It 1) extends the aim of mission from a narrowly ecclesiocentric (planting the church) or Christocentric (making disciples of Jesus) goal, to a fully theocentric one (building up the Kingdom). And it 2) shifts the emphasis of missionary praxis from individual proclamation (often an alibi for genuine Christian life) to costly, prophetic community witness.

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22 Michael Amaladoss, "Religious and Mission", *SEDOS Bulletin* 25 (1993) 207-213 (208)

Mission Without the Church?

God's mission began with creation and is continued by leading the whole creation to its consummation in the Kingdom of God. Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God and in him the Kingdom became visible, tangible and transparent. The Church continues the ministry of Jesus by being and becoming a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom, and thus it is at the service of the Kingdom. Hence the primary objective of the mission of the Church is not to convert individuals to the Church, although new Christian communities are needed everywhere and at all times for rendering visibility to the Kingdom and to convert people to the Kingdom. But such a Church will be a little flock, a light set on the mountain top, and leaven in the world.

Introduction

Post Vatican Missiological literature witnesses a major uncertainty regarding the aim of mission. Formally it was a black and white issue: The purpose of mission was to proclaim the gospel and plant the church (Ad Gentes 6). However the increasing awareness of the complexity of its nature and of the acceptance of the possibility of salvation outside the Church, together contributed to the development of an uncertainty regarding the object of mission. For some baptism and the formation of ecclesial communities are no more part of the mission of the church. Mission is more concerned with the values of the Kingdom. While others still cling to the pre-Vatican concept of the absoluteness of the church, even if the actual expression of this may be watered down.

The National Consultation on Mission held at Ishvani Kendra from 4-9 January 1994, brought this uncertainty very much to the fore¹. With this background, the paper is a reflection on the true significance of baptism and formation of the ecclesial community in the mission of the Church.

1 Cf. *Paths of Mission in India Today, Statement of the National Consultation on Mission*, 4-9 January 1994, Ishvani Kendra, Pune, Nos 5-6.

Mission of Jesus

Jesus began his ministry by announcing the arrival of the Kingdom (Mk. 1:14-15; Lk. 4:18-19). The Kingdom of God is foundational to his mission. His person and his ministry are the manifestation of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes "the rest", which is "given in addition" (EN 8). For Jesus God's reign is the starting point and the context for mission². However it is not easy to define what Jesus exactly meant by the Kingdom of God. A leading characteristic of it is that it is something that has come in the person of Jesus. Jesus inaugurates the Kingdom (Mk. 1:15). It is a new order of life. The hope of deliverance is not a distant song about a far-away future. The future is already now. Yet the future dimension cannot be eliminated altogether. He taught his disciples to pray for the coming of the Kingdom. This tension between the already and the not yet of God's reign is a mark of Jesus' ministry.

The divine reign overcomes evil in any form such as pain, sickness, death, demon-possession, personal sin, immorality, loveless self-righteousness of those who claim to know God, the maintaining of special class privileges and exploitation of others, the brokenness of human relationships etc. The coming of the Kingdom is a good News particularly to the poor and those at the periphery of the society. They experience the benefits of the arrival of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is the expression of the Father's mercy. In Jesus God's plan is brought to fulfillment (RM 13).

On the other hand Jesus, even as he proclaimed the arrival of the Kingdom, constitutes a community (Mk. 1:16ff) to whom he entrusts his own mission (Mk. 3:14ff). The community is sent by Jesus as he himself by the Father (Jn. 20:21). Hence there is an intimate link between the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus and the Church. Just as Christ is the address of God to the world, so too the church is commissioned to be God's agent. The church is sent for the world. Mission is the church's turning towards and being for the world, as it is the continuation of the mission of Jesus to the world. The Church came to be as

2 Cf. D. Senior and C. Stuhlmueueller (eds), *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, Orbis, New York, 1983, p. 144.

such in recognition of its being a mission. This is reflected in all the four gospels. The church as a corporate body or community as a whole, is sent outward to the world.

Traditional understanding of Mission

Our understanding of the nature and mission of the church is predetermined by our understanding of the Kingdom and its relation to the church. Since the Constantinian victory over Maxentius over the Milavian bridge in 312, the church became increasingly identified with the Kingdom. Under this perspective mission was simply the expansion of the church. The purpose of mission was bringing more and more people into the church since it was the Kingdom. It was the community of the saved. The presumption was that ultimately the whole humanity would be part of the church. The aim was a world-embracing church. Nothing would remain outside it eventually. Expansion, conversion in the sense of baptism, planting, saving etc., were the leading concepts of the mission. Salvation was the central theme of the missiological discussions. Mission was an attribute of the church. God's mission was directed to the church which in turn try to salvage men and women from the world by bringing them within its fold.

There was the cold doctrinal way of looking at the church. In the beginning God was existing in isolation; then to manifest His glory, God created the world and human beings with intellect and will. Then again for reasons known to Himself, God put humans to a test in which humans failed. That failure was a metaphysical insult to God which had to be paid for by a divine being. Hence God the son comes to make reparation for the original failure. This he accomplished through his death and resurrection and then he returned to heaven having instituted the church as the trustee of the benefits of his redeeming activity. The church is sent to communicate the fruit of the redemption by bringing people into it.

Though some of the biblical texts can be used in support of the above doctrinal approach, that is not what we see in the Gospels. There except for one or two isolated verses (f.i. Mk 14:24) we do not come across any talk of reparation or redemption. The whole ministry of Jesus is a manifestation of God's radical love, the continuation of the same love manifested in

creation. There is no disruption of that love between creation and Christ event.

Since Vatican II

Vatican II was primarily a self examination by the church of its own mystery in relation to the world. Among other things the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium* gave a very radical description of the church. It is a sacrament of intimate union with God and of the unity of all human kind, that is, she is a sign and instrument of such union and unity (LG 1). The whole centre of gravity is suddenly shifted from the church to the world. This is further described more eloquently by the Pastoral Constitution of the church, *Gaudium et Spes*. God's mission is to the world which is his creation and is in itself good. The church is only an instrument in this mission. The church is not the Kingdom. It cannot be identified with the Kingdom. It is a sign of the Kingdom. Humans must be able to see the ineffable goodness and beauty of the Kingdom in the church and must be ultimately attracted to the Kingdom. In this way the church increasingly contributes to the ever deeper realization of the Kingdom.

That is the service the Church renders to the world. Human beings exist in history. They need something tangible and perceptible for recognizing the Kingdom. This was first realized in Jesus of Nazareth in an absolute way. The Word that has been active from the beginning in an absolute sense (Jn. 1:1) and the Word that enlightens every human being (and thus every religious endeavour) became a human person to show what it meant to be the divine reign both from the part of God by manifesting the divine nature in relation to humans, the human face of God, and from the part of the human by rendering adequate response to God. The Kingdom, or God's reign, is thus a two-fold reality as manifested in Jesus. All those who came in contact with him and believed in him could experience the Kingdom in its two-fold reality. This reality as such is to be continued in the church (Jn. 20:18ff).

Jesus by constituting the community and commissioning them bequeathed to them the duty of representing and reactualizing the reality of the Kingdom for all people to behold.

But the church does not exhaust the reality of the Kingdom. In so far as every human being is created by God through the same Word and in so far as every human being is enlightened by the same Word, every human being is a child of God and thus a part of the people of God. What is specific to the church is that it is by vocation the sign and instrument of the Kingdom for all people at all times to come in contact with the reality of the Kingdom as it was manifested in Jesus Christ. This mission is precisely one of sacramentalization, i. e., rendering visibility and thereby causing people to be reminded of the reality of the Kingdom and to be converted to the Kingdom situation from a non-Kingdom one in the lives of persons and of society. Essentially this is a mission of presence and witness, even as the incarnate Word was God's presence on earth. He manifested God's nature in a perfect way as far as human beings can grasp (RM. 20).

This is the service that is required of the church. Its very vocation is to discharge this mission of presenting and actualizing divine love in the world where this love is already operative. It invites all to take note of this love and to respond to it. The same love and response to it can be described as an "Abba-experience", i. e., experience of God as Our Father/Mother, with its practical consequence of accepting the neighbour as our brother/sister. Here we see the theological significance of Jesus' all inclusive table-fellowship, particularly his act of including the lonely and the forsaken.

Our own experience of situations of exploitation of humans by fellow humans, oppression, discrimination, violence to humans and nature, shows how we are part of a world whose situation is in sharp contrast to that of the Kingdom. This calls for the church's authentic presence and ministry of challenging witness. Due to human fragility and selfishness human beings are prone to move away from the Kingdom situation. To overcome this selfishness and to reach out to all as brothers/sisters, being children of God who is the Father/Mother of all, the church as community of radical love, has to be present at all times and places. Hence as part of its mission, the church does seek new members to join the community for the purpose of active sacramentalization of the Kingdom. It is obvious in this case the seeking of new members through baptism is for the sake of

mission and mission is not for the sake of planting the church. The church's vocation to collaborate in God's mission to the world requires a community, even as Jesus himself sought the help of a community to continue his mission.

God's Mission

An important aspect of Post-Vatican II Missiology is its emphasis on the fact that Mission is that of God. In the heyday of mission it was thought to be church's mission. Mission was taken to be an attribute of the church, which it could discharge according to its good will. The church was the sending agent. The whole affair originated with the church and as such controlled by the Supreme Pontiff and the curia.

However recent developments in biblical and systematic theology have brought about a change in this understanding. There has been a shift toward the understanding of mission as God's mission. In modern times Karl Barth was one of the first to articulate mission as the activity of God himself. The remote cause of this shift can be traced back to St. Thomas Aquinas who spoke of the mission of God's own self, with regard to the ascending and descending movements.

At the International Mission Conference at Willingen in 1952 Mission was described as being derived from the very nature of God. Mission is not a by-product of ecclesiology or of soteriology. The decree on the mission of the church of Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, anchors the theology of mission to the Trinity. Mission ultimately goes back to God who sends the Son and the Spirit. The sending of the Son and the Spirit by the Father is continued in the sending of the church. Hence Paul VI describes the church as missionary by its very nature in so far as it originates from the mission of the Son and of the Spirit (EN, 14-15).

God's mission is directed to the world. It began with the creation of the world. The sending of the Son and of the Spirit is in continuity with the same mission. In fact both the Son and the Spirit are operative right from the beginning. Everything was created through the Word (Jn. 1:1) and the Spirit of God hovered over the void at the moment of creation (Gen. 1:1-2).

The covenant that God made with humanity (Gen. 6:18; 9:11-17) is to be seen in this universalistic perspective. The same God continues his mission in the world as the Lord of history,

guiding the destiny of all, though he chooses a particular people for a specific mission, through the Mosaic covenant. However this particular covenant does not delete or displace the universal covenant. Rather the particular covenant is in the context of and at the service of the universal covenant.

The temptation had been there always both for the Israelites as well as later for the church to see themselves as the exclusive people of God. In Amos (9:7) Yahweh explicitly warns the Israelites against such exclusivism. Inheriting the tradition of the Jews, the church too has been seeing itself as *the People of God*. Nothing is far from the truth. As we shall see later the church's specificity is its mission, service, and not any exclusive claim to be the only people of God or the only children of God. For all participate in God's mission to the world in creation, in divine enlightenment (Jn. 1:1), in universal covenant and in the universal guidance of God as the Lord of History.

Since God's mission is to the world, God's concern is for the entire world. It affects all people in all aspects of their existence. Mission is God's turning to the world in respect of creation, care, redemption and consummation. It takes place in ordinary history and not exclusively through the church.

Thus mission, church, world history — all revolve around the biblical reality of the Kingdom of God. Mission takes its starting point from the reign of God. The church in Word and Sacrament proclaims the definite arrival of the Kingdom in Jesus of Nazareth, through its life as a community transformed by the spirit into a communion of faith, hope and love. It anticipates and projects the reality of the Kingdom and extends the Kingdom in history.

Church the Sacrament of the Kingdom

"Divinely sent to the nations as a sacrament of salvation", is how *Ad Gentes* describes the church (AG. 1). The church should be a sign of what God is doing in the world and what humans must do in response to it. If the church fails to be an authentic sign of this reality of divine love, it is not authentic, no matter whatever it may proclaim, no matter whatever doctrines it may define and whatever ritual practices it may prescribe.

The church is not primarily an institution to guarantee salvation. It is a community of disciples sent to continue the

mission of Jesus Christ, that of serving as the sacrament of the divine reign. The salvific aspect flows from it, and it is something occurring from the "creative" and "enlightening" process of the Word in which all share.

The church is called to be a community of service to the world, as the sacrament of the divine reign, and thus it is called to collaborate in God's mission to the world. Election in the scripture is not a privilege, but always an obligation to do a particular service. One is called or set apart for the realization of a plan of God, which surpasses the elected person.

The church as the sacrament of the world means the church has an other-oriented existence. It exists for the world; its vocation is not for running away from the world or taking the people out of the world to save them. It exists not for the sake of providing sacraments to the adherents. It provides sacraments to believers only for the sake of enabling them to discharge their mission faithfully.

The very same conviction that mission is God's and it is directed to the world, and is operative everywhere, makes the church shed all triumphalism and claims of uniqueness and superiority. The concept of sacrament is an important key to the understanding of the institutional church in the total plan of God. On the one hand God's activity and mission extends to all the world through his Spirit and the Logos. Nothing is outside this mission, this guidance. God wishes the salvation of all (1 Tim. 2:4). On the other hand the same God entered into a particular covenant with the Israelites which in turn has taken the form of a new covenant in Jesus Christ. Thus creation, other religions, history of Israel, Jesus Christ and the church all stand part of God's plan for the world. One does not delete the other. Rather the one is in the context of the other as an integral part of the whole.

The Council affirmed that the whole of humanity is caught up in God's work achieved in Christ (GS. 22). Thus by nature the church's existence is a call to exist for the sake of others. It cannot be preoccupied with itself and its own problems. Yet, as David Barrett has shown, at present 90% of its resources are dedicated for its own maintenance which is something abnormal. Church has to be outside-looking; turned inside out. A sacrament

exists for the sake of those to whom it manifests and communicates the divine mystery.

What is the task of the church in the world? Why does God call together the disciples of Jesus in the midst of today's world? In the past ages this question could not be answered with the same clarity as today. The church was a prisoner of the christendom mentality.

The Kingdom of God, the divine reign, is the ultimate realisation of God's purpose for the world. The church has manifestation of it, indicating what it eventually would be. The church is also a means towards the realization of it. In this the church is always conscious of the words of its Lord: "whoever does the will of my Father is my mother, brother and sister" (Mt. 12:50). The church is an exemplar and a guide by manifestation and invitation.

The church is church only to the extent that it lets itself to be used as part of God's dealings with the world, by continuation of the above service. Thus the church's reality is precisely to be at the service of God and of God's reign manifested in his son, Jesus Christ. The nature of the church is to be defined and seen in terms of its function, that of participating in Jesus' ministry. It's mission is witnessing to the Gospel of the Kingdom in word and deed. The church exists to the extent that it participates in the witnessing activity, in the proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom. Church, in this way, is the concrete witness to the embodiment of what it has received from Christ and continues to be the message of the Kingdom in history in a tangible manner.

The necessity of the Church

The church continues to serve as a constant sign of God's gracious presence to human race. Without the church the actualization of the revelation in Jesus Christ would not reach the human race at all times and in every place.

However the fact of the sacramental nature of the church must liberate us from any obsession with the absoluteness of the church and of attempting to link divine activity present in other religions somehow to the church. The divine activity and life present in others are neither received from the church nor are in view of the church. Rather than claiming the source of

divine life in these religions even remotely for itself the church must recognize that it is called to a service by God of manifesting what is present in them because it is the continuation of the mission of Jesus. Hence its vocation is to collaborate with the divine activity in the form of service. This does not make it the source or end of other religions.

Jesus' mission as well as that of the church can be understood only in the background of the biblical understanding of election. In the Bible God's plan for the world is revealed through a people. According to the Bible God is revealed in the history of the people. They are caught up in an intimate relationship with God so that their destiny displays to the world the mystery of God's ways and the generous plan God has conceived for the whole creation. What makes the Israelites a particular people is their relationship to God. God brought into existence a people and it has to identify itself with God's purpose for the world. They are called by God to recognize the mysterious ways in which God will bring these purposes to realization. They are to be God's agents in carrying forward God's purposes. God did not call Israel to a sort of exclusive aloofness but to be seen as a light to the world (Is. 42:6; 49:6). Other nations such as Egypt and Assyria, Israel's oppressors, will learn from Israel (Is. 19:21-25). Similarly the Servant Song (Is. 42:6-49:1) accentuates the service role of Israel on behalf of the nations.

The coming of Jesus and his ministry and the mission of the community he gave rise to, stand in continuity with the election and mission of Israel. Just as Israel's election is situated in the context of the broader human community so also the church is called in the context of the world. Recent exegesis has shown that when the early church took over the concept 'the People of God', from Judaism, it was not so much a substitution of Israel by the church as much as the expansion of the idea to the nations³.

God is not bound by any sacraments. That is to say the reality represented by the sacrament can be attained even outside

3 Cf. J. Dupont, Note sur le 'Peuple de Dieu' dans les Actes des Apostres in *Pontifical Biblical Commission Unite et Diversite dans l'Englise*, Vatican, 1989, pp. 209-222. Cf. also Ph. H. Menoud, "Le Peuple de Dieu dans le Christianisme primitif" *Foi et Vie*, 73 (1964) 390.

the sacrament. People can be part of the divine reign without becoming part of the church. Yet in so far as Jesus Christ instituted the church and bequeathed his mission to it, it is the efficacious sign willed by God of His presence in the world and of the reality of His reign in history. Hence the church has to be there to serve as the sacrament of the Kingdom.

This implies that evangelization must give rise to local communities of faith to serve as the sacrament of the Kingdom in that particular context. Thus mission begins with the growth of the community as an ongoing process. The community is not an end in itself but for the sake of mission. Even as the apostolic church was born for mission so also new communities are founded that they may serve as the sign and also raise up communities where they are not existing.

The primary intention of mission is not to seek the conversion of individuals to the church but to serve as a sign. The quality of the community's life and the effectiveness of its sign value is more crucial than numbers and expansion. This would also mean that the mission of the church may not always imply the raising of new communities but serving as a challenging sign to the rest of the world through the quality of its own existence.

Conclusion

The ultimate end of mission is the realization of the Kingdom of God that will fully be realized only at the parousia. But Kingdom has already been inaugurated in Jesus Christ. He has instituted the community of the disciples, the church to continue his ministry of rendering visibility to the Kingdom and of inviting men and women to be converted to the Kingdom. To serve as the sign and instrument of the Kingdom there has to be ecclesial communities everywhere and at all times. But such a church will be a community of the little flock, not a world-embracing church, it will be a light on the mountain top, not the mountain itself; it will be the leaven, not the loaf and it will be salt, not the entire meal.

Individual Conversions or Evangelization of Cultures

The author speaks about a paradigm-shift today in Missiology and consequently the need for a new style in the missionary practice, in the context of a new understanding of human cultures and their autonomy. In the old paradigm of a mono-cultural Christianity, the Gospel is preached to individuals who are "converted" and baptized, and thus separated from their own communities and cultural groups and joined to a mono-cultural Church which is planted there from outside. In the new paradigm of Christian mission individuals are not drawn out of their own communities where alone they can attain their identity and salvation. Rather, the Gospel is to be implanted in the people in their own socio-cultural identity where an encounter takes place between the Gospel and different cultures and religions with reciprocity and mutuality, thus leading to evangelization of cultures rather than "conversion" of certain individuals.

0.1 The question of conversion and baptism is a burning issue in the Indian missiological circles. This article is not directly concerned with it. Its chief concern is, rather, about the Church's new understanding of culture and the resulting new approach in mission described as *Evangelizing cultures*. The new perspective of culture in the Church is pregnant with very many implications for the ministry of evangelization, especially in a country like India proud of its culture and heritage. In fact, it is already orienting missionaries to shift their focus from individual conversions to a proclamation of the Gospel at the level of totality. No doubt, in this approach too, conversion remains an absolute necessity, just as in the old. But the emphasis is no more on individuals washed clean of their cultural identity. The vision behind the new approach is that the Gospel is primarily ordained to peoples and nations as such, i. e., to communities with their inalienable right to their historical and cultural identities. It is not to be aimed at individuals cut off from their community and cultural roots that gave them their identity. This

seems to be the mind of the Church who, especially after Vat. II, increasingly and compellingly speaks of the necessity of evangelizing cultures. This article is a probe into the new mission perspective which heralds a paradigm shift in the history of the mission.

0.2. While the new perspective of culture is sought to be applied only in the field of evangelization, in itself it possesses the potency for radically redefining and restructuring many aspects of the traditional institutional form of Christianity. The new intense awareness of the Church about the existential reciprocity between culture and the Gospel is causing much heartache concerning an unjust situation in her owing to a monocultural faith expression. Christian faith became monocultural and Christianity, a monolithic institution from the time of emperor Constantine and the overdominance of the Roman culture. This continued to be so from the fourth century on to Vat. II. Many aspects of the universality and uniformity that were marshalled into the prevalent institutional Christianity in the name of faith had actually nothing to do with the Gospel but were only due to the monoculturalism that was unfortunately but falsely practised in the Church. The new awareness of the vital link between the Gospel and Cultures will inevitably in the coming days lead to a relativization of several absolutes of church administration, dogma, liturgy etc. because they have but the sanctity of a culture but not of faith. A single culture cannot dictate absolute norms to the whole church. Based on the inherent validity and legitimacy of every culture, autonomy of the local churches, different ecclesiologies and Christologies will be again the order of the day, as it was in the New Testament times¹. The theology that backed up individual conversions was something hand in glove with monoculturalism, as we shall see later on in this article. But accepting the approach of evangelizing cultures by the church now shows her readiness to change. We will not be able to go into the details of the change demanded, but will here and there attempt to draw its contours.

0.3. For the church in India, the question of individual conversions or evangelizing cultures is of crucial importance. It is no less than what concerns her identity and fulfilment in the

1 Shorter A., *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, London, 1992, 256-60: 65-69.

land where she evangelizes. It is high time that we gave serious consideration to the B. J. P. contention that some minorities in India (Christianity included) have betrayed their Indian Identity in the name of religion. Even if this accusation may be politically motivated, we, Christians, should make a sincere introspection by asking ourselves: Has not the old approach with its predilection for individual conversions made the converts strangers in their own land of birth? This method in the mission has led the converts in India to a split conscience and the problem of double loyalty to one's faith and national identity. The new approach in the mission as indicated by evangelizing cultures may present a satisfying answer from the part of the Christian faith with an Indian identity.

1. The old missionary approach to Culture and Conversion

Almost upto Vat. II, mission theology held no brief for the existence of different cultures in the Church except in the most negative terms; so too, the rigid monocultural practice of the Faith, could admit converts into the church only as individuals stripped of their historical, social and cultural group identity. Let us examine the main ingredients of the old theology that dictated this approach.

1.1. Incarnation, an event of raw flesh meant only for expiation of sins

If in the present day missionary thinking, the divine Incarnation is the basis and model of the inculturation of faith and the main inspiration behind evangelizing cultures, it had only a single purpose for the early missionaries: divine atonement for human sins. This Anselmian theology filled the mind and heart of the early missionaries in general in India: the purpose of the divine Incarnation was to make adequate reparation for the offence committed by a finite creature against an infinite God. Only an infinite Person could make adequate atonement for humans and save them from punishment. God decided to save humans and that meant, he needed a body (incarnation) to suffer and thus make amends for the sins of humankind. In this understanding, Incarnation was an event of raw flesh; in itself it had nothing to do with culture and history. In such a theology of incarnation, human history and culture had no place.

1.2. *Idea of a monocultural Christianity*

The early missionaries believed that the religious truths were eternal and immutable. But this consideration was caused not so much by the character of the religious truths themselves, according to B. Lonergan, as by the normative and value constitutive culture of the eternal Roman empire. Rome conquered others who were considered Barbarians. These became civilized and refined only insofar as they conformed themselves to the Roman culture and thus it became normative for the rest of the world².

From the fourth century onwards, when the eternal imperial Rome started collapsing, the popes in Rome took over the Roman cultural legacy almost in full, resulting in the identification of the Christian faith with one culture and the emergence of a monocultural faith in the universal Church. This situation lasted almost 16 centuries, practically till Vat. II.

While this might have had many positive effects in the holy Roman empire, it spelt disaster in many respects for the evangelization of cultures. The missionary mind was doubly locked against relating faith and gospel to other cultures in a reciprocal sense: the double lock worked from their idea of religious truths as immutable and from the normative character acceded to the Roman culture with which their faith had got identified. As observed by A. Shorter in this connection, "Roman monoculturalism... was identified with Christianity. In other words, it was assumed that the Gospel must be proclaimed everywhere in a single, 'perfect', cultural form"³.

1.3. Identification of Truth, Grace, Salvation and means of salvation with the institutional church was such a powerful fundamental theological position of the early missionaries that it created in them a totally negative attitude to other religions and cultures; they could not even in principle, expect any thing positive in others. This is very clear from a study of the attitudes and approaches of the early missionaries to other religions and cultures⁴.

2 Lonergan, B., *Method in Theology*, London, 1973, 301-327.

3 *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, op. cit. 18.

4 Karokaran, A., *Evangelization and Diakonia*, Bangalore 1978, 11-17.

1.4. The following stances also sealed their distance from other cultures: i) an idea of the original sin that puts culture and human nature in a negative light; ii) their preoccupation with saving souls rather than the total human; iii) Sin, holiness, salvation, sacraments were all confined to the sphere of individuals; iv) their understanding of religious truth was predominantly speculative and intellectual; its teaching and transference was an elitist and conceptual process with some occasional concession to popular piety and imagination; v) While the Western missionaries loved the natives, they held the latter's culture inferior because of their racial superiority complex in the colonial era.

2. *The Correlation between monoculturalism in the church and negative attitude to other religions and cultures, on the one hand, and individual conversion, on the other, in the old missionary approach*

Monoculturalism and negative approach so characteristic of the colonial missionary era seemed to have precluded any meaningful reciprocal relationship between the Gospel and Cultures; under this dispensation one could conceive and admit of only individual conversions. Our preceding analysis though short has clearly shown how monoculturalism militates against a truly multicultural church, i. e., a church of communion of different peoples with their specific identities still in full vigour and display. We have also observed how and why the early missionaries came to possess such an uncompromising negative attitude towards other cultures and religions. Now these two factors had a necessary correlation to the aim and method in the old approach in terms of preaching, converting and planting the church. Let us see how it worked:

2.1. *Preaching*

This was considered by the early missionaries as the means par excellence. It was through and through a monologue. A missionary could not expect any thing positive from other religions and cultures; he possessed the absolute truth and he alone. Therefore, there could be only one way traffic. There could not be any truck between the Church identified with absolute Truth and other religions considered as a work of Satan, i. e., darkness. That was the reason why preaching often took the

form of a scathing indictment of other cultures, peoples and religions. The early missionary preaching, debates and disputes seem to have aimed at the destruction of religions and cultures, liberate the individuals from the system (i.e., the identity as coming from their culture and religion) and relate him to the Gospel as an individual by an appeal to his conscience, i.e., through conversion.

2.2. *Conversion and baptism*

As is clear from the preceding reflection, missionaries could not according to their theology and cultural understanding of faith, allow other religions and cultures any right to exist and the question of a reciprocal relation between the two did not arise at all. Jesus' meaning, significance and orientation could then be only to individuals as individuals; there could be only one to one relationship between Jesus Christ and the individuals being converted, baptized and made members of the church. But they had to pay a huge price for this: a clean break with their past identity no matter from whichever quarter it came: be it family, society, religion, culture or history. This sort of policy on conversion meant that one who accepts Jesus Christ and becomes member of the church is practically turned into a stranger to one's community.

2.3. *Planting the church*

This had in the old missionary approach a concrete meaning as an end and programme of evangelization. More than building up a fellowship around Jesus Christ, it meant planting a particular institutional model of the church. Since the faith was identified with the Western culture, this particular model assumed an absolute character. Planting church in the old idiom, therefore, meant the extension of the socio-cultural institutional character of Western Christianity into India. Planting church involved an unnecessary amount of institutionalization in the name of faith. It was also assured that for a third time after preaching and converting, the converted could enter the church only as individuals.

In the old scheme of evangelization, the indigenous culture was not allowed even a minimum of foot hold: both in the proclamation and acceptance of faith, local culture had no role to play. It was as if faith was sought to be given a virgin birth in Asia with the least mediation assigned to local cultures.

This may be the reason why many a Western missionary thought of isolating and bringing the converts into a secure place, away from the contamination of the environment. Here they shaped the so called mission compound Christianity. But till today they have remained incapable of joining the national main stream. Often their isolation, owing to their insular culture, evokes suspicion in others' mind about their loyalty to the land.

The Western missionaries in India succeeded in certain times and places in converting large numbers of people from certain sections of the Indian populace. But it is to be noted that, here too, conversion has been on an individual basis. This is because whether isolated individuals or large numbers, once converted, they could not carry the heritage and identity that was theirs as a social, cultural, religious and historical entity to the monocultural church planted by the missionary. During the process of evangelization traditionally practised in terms of preaching, converting and planting the church, the root paradigms of many groups who entered the church in the colonial era got destroyed and they thereby lost their cultural identity which built them into a group⁵. Once they entered the church planted in the colonial era, they ceased to be the same historico-cultural group, but became a collection of individuals deprived of their God-given identity, i.e., a group that could have found a mutuality with the Gospel and remained in continuity with their own cultural group. In effective terms, as we observed earlier, they were admitted into the church as individuals and given a new identity, not only of faith but also of an alien culture. This was the reason why even these people who entered the church in the colonial period through the so called group conversion, quickly got isolated from their parent cultural strata and became insular and incapable of effectively witnessing to their own original communities. The Gospel thus lost a chance of encountering cultures in a historical set up and snowballing into a movement from people to people.

The only silver lining in this otherwise dark cloud of mission history is De Nobili. His experiments were bold. However, they were mostly in the nature of accomodation or adaptation.

5 Turner, V., Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, New York, 1978, 248-49

In substance they did not form a serious exception to the mission theology of his times and were in themselves a far cry from the ideal of evangelizing cultures accepted by the church from Vat. II.

3. Culture at the centre stage of evangelization

Culture played a very insignificant role in the evangelization of peoples, as we have already noted. It has now been acknowledged as a fatal error committed by the church. Ever since Vat. II and especially in these last twenty years she has been trying to retrieve some of the lost ground and reorient the work of evangelization in view of the centrality of culture in human life. There are, in this new awareness, a number of factors that will eventually reshape the goals of evangelization as traditionally understood and practised. But we will focus our attention only on certain aspects that have a special bearing on our theme: proclamation of the Gospel should be ordained to peoples and cultures as such and not to individuals minus their group identity.

3.1. Human existence as a dialogical

Interrelatedness

A human being is not an individual or a monad existing in and for itself, but an interrelatedness — a person in communion; a human being becomes what he/she is only in and through a community. This is the existential and ontological structure and nature of human existence.

A quick comparison of humans with another form of life i. e., an animal will bring us straight to the heart of the matter. An animal is essentially a closed system. It exists in itself and for itself. In order to be itself and attain the perfection of its species, it does not need the other. An Alsatian pup, brought up in complete isolation from its natural community will still normally grow into the perfection of its race without any help from the other members of its family. This is because it has got its limited and closed end printed in itself. It will, therefore, aggressively assert itself in order to stick to its selfsameness. But an animal which has its end in itself, lives for itself and does not need the other for its own growth. It reproduces itself; but never progresses from one point to another even after millennia. Hence an animal is a-historical.

In contrast to an animal, the human is a historical being. It means, the human progresses from one point to another. This is

made possible, because unlike an animal which is ever a selfness/an existence and end in itself, human being is an open system. On an ontological level, humans are constituted not only of selfness but also of otherness. They are aware of their being incomplete, dependent; yet they also know that they are endlessly open and will have to seek their identity and attain thus fulfilment elsewhere than in themselves.

The ontological constitution of the selfness and otherness of a human person is designed to help him/her move from the point of selfness to the unbound Otherness. This is the essence of human existence. This we call historical in contrast to and comparison with the a-historical nature of an animal and the instant perfection of an angel who does not need to undergo a time-space-bound process to scale the mountain of perfection.

In the context of our reflection, the historical character of human existence shows how deeply the human is a communal self—an existence in communion. The other becomes the condition and guarantee of one's own self realization: an individual self can be realized only outside oneself, only insofar as one goes out and receives from the other. This existence is an act in reciprocity; it is a dialogical interrelatedness with God, neighbour and cosmos.

3.2. *Culture is the dynamics of interrelatedness in a society in its march towards achieving the goals of existence*

Culture is a direct offshoot and necessary expression of the historical nature of human existence. If historical nature enables human beings to move towards Fullness in an unlimited way *Through a Process of Interrelatedness with the other*, then culture is the very dynamics and idiom of this interrelatedness/selftranscendence, equipping, shaping and forming one to orient oneself to the other: nature, neighbour and God. Culture, as the dynamics of interrelatedness is, "A set of symbols, stories, myths, and norms of conduct that orient a society or group cognitively, affectively and behaviorally to the world in which it lives⁶" A member of the society becomes refined and capable of growth and self-transcendence, in short, human only insofar as he/she is involved in this cultural dynamics at work in the

6 Schineller, P., as quoted by A. Shorter, op. cit., p. 5

society. In this sense, culture is practically equivalent to humanness⁷. For an individual, culture is both the key to the meaning of existence and the *sadhana* for the realization of the meaning.

3.2.1. Our observations on the historical nature of human existence and the dynamics of culture, make it clear how a human individual cannot be conceived of except as part and parcel of a greater whole. That he / she is a free individual does not constitute him/her as an autonomous self, but as a person in an act of interdependence and interrelatedness. The values he/she possesses and his/her movement towards Life and Reality are essentially part of a communal act and search aimed at the goals of life.

A human person is created in God's image. Just as God is not a monad, but a community, and that he is God because of a mutual exchange taking place within him, so too, a human person is a community in existential terms and is human only in so far as he/she is in a constant give and take. Therefore, an individual human being cannot be properly understood, given a value worth its name and personally and meaningfully addressed apart from his community.

3.3. *History and culture necessarily entail the coming into being of different peoples with their specific identities*

Compared to animals and angels, historicalness is the very specificity of human existence. It necessarily involves humans' interrelatedness with cosmos, neighbour and God, but will be always expressed in particular categories of time and place. Human interaction always takes place in a specific environment. A particular dynamics is developed as a result of this interaction⁸. This will include a particular approach and grasp of the ultimate reality, a particular vision of the goals of life, a particular prioritization of values needed, a particular organizational genius, social, economic and administrative set-up. These particular emphases, structures or paradigms of meanings and values that are evolved by a group of humans in interaction with a concrete and specifically different situation form and shape the various peoples of the earth and invest them with some inherent specificities of existential roots. As S. B. Bevans says, "Reality is not

just 'out there'; reality is mediated by meaning, a meaning we give it in the context of our culture or our historical period, interpreted from our own particular horizon and in our particular thought patterns"⁹. We want to pinpoint here that because of our historical character, human existence will not merely be communitarian, but communitarian in a specific way, shot through by a particular identity.

A crucial point to be taken into account by us in connection with the particular identities of peoples is this: while they can be certainly complementary to each other, and can be similar to each other in a number of behavioural patterns, there will be certain irreducibles going to the very roots of their existence and particular cultural identity. Victor Turner calls them the root paradigms of a society¹⁰. It is because of these that a particular people and each member thereof become specifically what they are. They are the life line of that particular society and individual. You try to destroy them and you have a whole particular society and culture destroyed and the individuals thereof turned into life long vagabonds of humanity.

3.4. Every culture enjoys autonomy and has an inherent right to exist and to be addressed by the Gospel but not in terms of another culture

From our preceding reflections it follows that different peoples and their respective cultural identities have an inherent validity of their own (G. S. 59). They are also thereby invested with a necessary amount of autonomy. Hence every particular culture exists in its own right and no culture will be justified in dominating another culture or impinging on its legitimate decision-making power regarding the management of its own affairs. If so, a monocultural church can no more be the order of the day.

3.4.1. Reciprocity between Gospel and culture

The inherent validity and autonomy of each people based on their cultural and historical identity, by itself posits mutuality and reciprocity between Gospel and culture. Jesus Christ has to be related to the different peoples of the earth in their particular

⁹ Bevens, S., *Models of contextual Theology*, New York, 1992, p. 2.

¹⁰ Turner, V., *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, London, 1983, 46-47; 64.

identities. This means at least two things: Gospel does not negate the identity of man. The historical revelation is understood as a dialogical process. What is emphasised here is not negation and imposition, but mutuality and reciprocity. Faith and culture need each other. A missionary has, therefore, to accept the autonomy of the culture to which he addresses the Gospel. The other factor a missionary has to be mindful of is that on the basis of the mutuality and reciprocity of the Gospel and cultures a direct encounter between them should be, as far as possible, facilitated in the proclamation. The age old tradition and patrimony of the church and the evangelizer's culture itself should not be given in proclamation a role more than that of a mutual friend who takes the initiative for an encounter between Jesus and a culture. They should not put themselves either in the place of Jesus or the culture to which he is addressed.

I do not mean here the kind of direct encounter between Jesus and the apostles. In a physical sense, this is not repeatable. But just as Jesus, even as he was the universal Saviour, could still relate himself with the particular identity of the Jews in reciprocity and mutuality so too, the Gospel can be related today with every particular people and nation from within their identity on a note of mutuality.

But this can never be achieved if a monocultural church and a consequent monolithic ecclesiology and Christology are going to be considered the only expression and guarantee of a true universal Christ and Church. An evangelization that has a bulldozing uniformity as its burden can never be called evangelization of cultures because it does not accept the inherent validity and autonomy of cultures in effective terms. This kind of evangelization can only produce a collection of uprooted individual converts without in any way recognizing the need and necessity of particular Churches, with different Christologies and ecclesiologies which are bound to bloom if an encounter between the Gospel and different cultures is truly allowed to take place on the basis of reciprocity and mutuality. The policy of mere individual conversions will never be able to achieve this. It is doing violence to cultures and peoples and degrading humans to a level of nuts and bolts of a standard machine which can be loosened from one and fitted into another without difficulty.

3.5. *The new official view of the church on the centrality of culture*

Evangelii Nuntiandi understands culture as the specific modality of realizing the various aspects of evangelization and its central concern¹¹. Pope John Paul II refers to culture as human's specific way of being¹². He considers it the key that gives access to the deepest and most jealously guarded secrets of the life of peoples, and, it is the fundamental and unifying expression of their existence¹³. He points out that the path of culture is the path of the human who meets God along this path and, therefore, concludes that the Gospel of Christ, the Incarnate Word will find its home on the path of culture and from this it will continue to offer the message of salvation and eternal life¹⁴. Summing up the new consciousness of the Church about culture, Ary R. Crollius says: "For the first time, it seems, the Church has been led to envisage social life and cultural life as a whole, at the central meeting point of all its problems: economic, political, domestic, philosophical and religious. Thus the issue of inculturation, instead of being just one aspect of the missionary activity of the church, becomes the central concern of the Church's evangelizing activity"¹⁵.

3.5.1. This new awareness of the Church about culture is what inevitably takes her to change her focus from individuals to peoples and communities (G. S. 59). The Mission Decree, *Ad Gentes*, has in its second chapter laid stress on peoples and their socio-cultural environment rather than on individuals. This is because, as the *Gaudium et Spes* observes, the individuals themselves can attain their maturity and fullness only through their specific culture (No. 53).

3.5.1.1. *A change of method and goal setting*

The change of focus from individuals to the community that builds up the individuals, also results in a change of method and goal setting of evangelization. As we had observed earlier, these were formerly spelt out in terms of 'preaching' (practised

11 Vadakumpadan, Paul, *Evangelization Today*, Shillong, 1989, 308

12 John Paul II, AAS, 73, 1981, 422-23

13 Ibid, 412

14 AAS, 74, 1982, 615-16

15 Crollius, A. R. . What is so new about Inculturation. Rome 1984, 16

as monologue that did not relate the Gospel to the culture of the people addressed); 'converting' (emphasis on individuals involving socio-cultural and religious alienation) and 'planting church' (in effective terms, a monocultural, Western type institution). As the thrust of the official church pronouncements on evangelizing cultures signifies, it is no more plucking away individuals from their wholeness; it is no more preaching Gospel unrelated to people's culture; it is no more extending monocultural and monolithic church structure.

On the contrary, according to the new thrust, the method and goals are defined on the basis of reciprocity and mutuality. And, therefore, instead of drawing out individuals after conversion, it is the Faith that now enters into a people and becomes an insider; instead of planting a branch of a monocultural church among a people, it is now the whole particular people that are going to be the Church.

A key expression in the documents typifying the new goal setting is implanting God's word in a culture. It means that the Gospel implanted in a people/culture will grow by absorbing nourishments from the local culture, a process in which it will also transform it from within (A.G.22).

The new approach is expressed also as Inculturation which is modelled on Incarnation: Christ's commitment to and solidarity with a particular people and culture (A.G.10). Evangelization in an authentic sense is the ongoing process of Christ's incarnation in time and space; it is the cultural embodiment of the Gospel in every people at all times in every place. One cannot express this point more forcefully than Pope John Paul II when he said: "A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, . . . not fully lived out"¹⁶.

3.5.2. II Vatican Council's vision of the Church as a communion of particular churches and its throbbing reality located in them, has no doubt been shaped by the new awareness of the centrality of culture and of some allied factors such as the inherent legitimacy and inviolability and autonomy of different peoples and cultures; their mutual irreducibility and at the same

16 L' Osservatore Romano, 28 June, 1982, as quoted by A. Shorter op. cit. p. 231

time also their complementarity. But the particular churches, as envisaged by Vatican II along the lines indicated above, are yet to be realised. The newly promulgated Canon law, and the continuous flow of instructions from above do not tally with the demands of the autonomy of the particular churches.

4. *The Christian perception of Revelation/Redemption as an event in history and its vital significance for an understanding of mission as evangelizing cultures/Inculturation*

The Christian Faith and community came into existence through a special act of liberation in history by the Person of Jesus Christ. If so, we cannot subscribe to the view that what matters is the message of this act and revelation and not its historical character. But certain tendencies today in some theological circles to make God, or an 'ontic Christ' the point of departure for mission and not Jesus of Nazareth betray an unpardonable lack of understanding of the significance of a revelation in history.

It is highly regrettable that the very sense and driving force of the revelation in history has been, during the course of time, all but lost upon the church herself. If completely lost she would thereby forfeit her very right to exist. For, she owes both her origin and the title to continue to exist solely to God's revelation/liberative act in history. She has been slowly whittling down her identity consciousness as a reality brought forth by God's intervention in history.

This whittling down of the historical identity can be observed on several fronts. The popular Anselmian theory explaining the meaning of Incarnation in exclusive terms of sin and its expiation is an instance. A certain prevalent sacramental theology built upon this theory holds that by the sacrifice at Calvary enough and more merits have been stored and entrusted to the church which she now distributes to the faithful through the sacraments for their salvation and that of the world. These theories do not at any stage relate Jesus' liberative act/revelation in history to the inner process of history and centrality of culture in human life. Such a view of a revelation in history can serve only to reduce sin, holiness, sacramental grace, salvation etc. to the private sphere of souls and individuals. No wonder, history never became a constitutive element of the

uniqueness of the Christian revelation in the entire old missionary paradigm, when the goals of evangelization were described as saving souls and conversion (practically confined to individuals). Again, see how the other important aim in the old mission paradigm, i. e., planting church, has been unilaterally translated into a complete institutionalization pattern of evangelization in all spheres: juridical, spiritual, cultural and material. This kind and extent of institutionalization has made the church an insular and self-serving structure, rendering it near impossible to enter into the main stream of history, culture and nation. Another factor that takes the wind out of the sails of a revelation in history is the attempt of the traditional theology to encapsulate the uniqueness of the revelation in history in conceptual, dogmatic formulations and to prove its superiority over other religions in terms of some intellectual truths unheard of anywhere else. Worse still, if the very Person of Jesus Christ and his truth are identified with these very formulations themselves.

One feels, however, that the above mentioned understanding of Christian revelation and a praxis based on it are tantamount to a sell-out of the very soul of a revelation/liberation effected in history in Jesus Christ. The foremost drawback in these theological stances, from our point of view, is their inherent inability to perceive the co-relation between the historicalness of human existence and the historicalness of the revelation/act of liberation in Jesus Christ. It is only at this meeting point that Jesus makes sense as a Saviour in history and that too, a Saviour for all persons, peoples and cultures in the very concreteness and particularity of their human existence. An understanding of revelation in history in its proper perspective will also give us some valid clues to the necessity and validity of the new approach in mission—an approach that goes beyond mere individual conversions to an evangelization of cultures and peoples in their wholeness.

4.1. The New Testament gives us a deep insight into the historicalness of the revelation in the words of Hebrews, 1:1-2, "In many and various ways... God spoke in olden times; but now he has spoken by a Son..." Another important text is Col., 2:9, "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily". Some very significant verses come in the first chapter of John;

“The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...; we have seen his glory as of the only begotten Son of God full of Truth and Goodness”. These texts as well as the entire New Testament proclamation about the Saviourhood of Jesus speak of a new dimension in God’s mode of Self-disclosure to humankind which is specifically different from the earlier ones such as through the presence of his Word in creation, through signs, symbols, and prophets. The new dimension in God’s mode of Self-communication to the human is his Word in human flesh. This expression, flesh, surely does not merely mean in a primary sense the raw flesh, material or physical aspect of the mode of the divine communication, the purpose of which is a bloody sacrifice to appease an enraged god. But the real significance of the expression, flesh, is that now God enters into a Self-communication in terms of an identification with the very identity of human existence. In one of the previous sections, we have seen that the identity of the human existence, its specificity is to be understood as historicalness. God’s new mode in Self-communication, his Word in flesh, his communication through identification means a Self-disclosure that matches, reciprocates, corresponds with the very historical identity of the human. We have to understand the historicalness of the Christian revelation primarily in this fashion. Its uniqueness is to be understood this way. Only then will it be able to assume a universal salvific significance. Only this way will the Son of man be able to enter into the self of every human being to help him/her realize his/her identity in God in actual historical conditions.

From the perspective of our paper, the historicalness of revelation comes to mean the following factors:

1. The significance of the Christian revelation emerges, not merely out of the revealed truth only, but also out of the mode/medium. Here the world, history, culture, religion, society, the struggles and aspirations of the people, in one word, the concrete humanity form one unit with the text itself and not merely a context or backdrop against which a pure idea is disclosed. God does not save what he has not assumed (St. Ireneus). The concrete humanity becomes part of the text itself. The new dimension expressed in the revelation in history is a unique case where the medium itself becomes the message. In fact, this is the radicality of a revelation in history, which St. Paul, the

theologian expressed in Phil. 2:5-11. Kenosis, the process of God becoming man (from birth till death this process continued) was itself the most authentic expression in human/historical terms of what the Truth of God is: the absolute other centeredness, Servanthood (I am among you as one who serves), that fulfils and liberates others.

2. The expressions, 'flesh', 'Immanuel' mean that God is not only interested in but also helps the human in the fulfilment of his/her identity as a historical being; much more than that, He saves humans through involvement, i. e., by becoming part and parcel of the process of their historical existence. Now, this is concrete humanity, the world humans live in: their daily struggles, aspirations, culture, religion, value system etc. These are the concrete historical categories by which humans relate themselves with their neighbours, God, cosmos and transcend themselves towards the fullness of life. Incarnation/revelation in history means, God's solidarity with humans in this process as an insider.

3. Revelation in history means, true to his identity as a historical being, the human has to attain fulfilment or realization of God within history itself and not outside it in some spurious mysticism and flight from the world/neighbour. In the context of sin, revelation in history means, the experience of liberation in Jesus Christ here and now in history, in the very actual conditions where sin/self-centredness rules the roost. That is to say, revelation in history is to be understood as the liberation of the human in Jesus' agonizing experience to express God's identity of absolute other centredness in and through concrete and authentic historicalness of human existence which sin had turned into a stifling dead-ended autonomous self. Revelation in history is then not any gnostic process of communicating God's salvific Truth in concepts or enlightening human mind in a dehistoricized vacuum. Jesus is the Saviour in history and he saves humans here in the midst of history. He unsettles and uncovers the falsehood erected by humans in every aspect of their life and witnesses to God's liberating Truth in terms of kenosis, Paschal mystery, that is, utter identification with human existence, in order to transform that particular concrete existence from within.

4. God's act of revelation/liberation in history means that God through his identification with humans (Jesus dies to his autonomous self and establishes a community in his Person) restores them to the authenticity of their historical existence, i. e., enables them to grow to Fullness through interrelatedness with cosmos, neighbour and God. Revelation/liberation in history is, therefore, in concrete terms an act of reconciliation. Paul emphasises this aspect when he frequently calls evangelization as a ministry of reconciliation building up of a new humanity in Jesus' body of flesh out of estranged and alienated persons (Col. 1:19-21; Gal. 3:28).

5. The decisiveness of the revelation in history is precisely because it speaks to and meets humans on their own home grounds. Here, therefore, they feel the most proximate nearness of God, in terms of the personalness of their existence: they now encounter God up there as a personal presence in Jesus down here (Kingdom of God and God's nearness were foremost expressed in the very Person of Jesus). If the cardinal point of the historicalness of humans is their growth through interpersonal inter-relatedness, then the historicalness of the Christian revelation in this connection means, humans are enabled to enter into an interpersonal relatedness with God in their own concrete existential categories. Therefore, God's Self-communication in historical terms demands, as E. Schillebeeckx observes, from the human a decisive response¹⁷. The quality, 'historical' is never a liability to or weakening of the truth value of divine revelation, but on the other hand, an incalculable asset, if it is seen in its relation to the historicalness of the human existence. The revelation in Jesus Christ can in a decisive way grip and challenge the human precisely because it is given historically.

5. At the end of our rather long reflections, we come to some obvious conclusions on the question of evangelization of cultures or individual conversions. We have seen how the Gospel stands in a close co-relation with the deeply ingrained concrete historical identities of peoples and the dynamics of culture in human life. The Gospel is thus primarily ordained to peoples in their wholeness. Individuals as individuals i. e., taken in isolation and uprooted from their historical, cultural moorings, do

17 Schillebeeckx, E., "Speaking in Parables", Robert J. Schreier, (Ed.), The

not seem to exist in the scheme of the historical nature of humans, their deeply cultural orientation to the realization of life's goals, or the historicalness of the revelation in Jesus Chrst. From these perspectives, it follows that individuals as individuals cannot be addressed by the Gospel in a meaningful and resonating way. Nor can they be locked in a decisive encounter with the Person of Jesus Christ. Ordinarily speaking, an individual's adequate and authentic response to the Gospel can come only when he/she is a person in communion with the community which has shaped his/her self-awareness and ability to respond. This means, one must be helped to move as part of a living whole and not independent of it. Therefore, evangelizing cultures/communities should be our obvious choice.

With the new approach spelt out as evangelizing cultures, we are entering into a new paradigm in mission theology. This does not mean a total break with the past. Jesus and his significance and the necessity of conversion continue also in the new, one should say, with a greater force. But, then, there is going to be a definite break with certain constellation of values followed in the old paradigm signified by the expression, 'individual conversions'. This constellation of values includes a monolithic church institution based on a monocultural faith: the identification of faith, grace, truth and salvation with this kind of a monocultural and monolithic church establishment; the method and goals of evangelization in terms of preaching (monologue), saving souls (converting individuals) and planting church in so far as they effectively implement the project of establishing a monocultural faith and a monolithic church.

The new paradigm is centered on Jesus Christ who through witnessing and proclamation is related to the different peoples from within their identity formed by their particular history, culture, religion and society. This process will mostly take the form and method of a dialogue in the context of an encounter of faith (Christian community) with peoples in a historical setting (interculturalization). In today's Asia, relating Jesus Christ to people from within their living identity will take the form of a participation in the struggles of masses for dignity and justice and an

evangelizing community's collaboration with all who work for the realization of the values of the Kingdom. In the new paradigm, the goal of evangelization will not be set in terms of individual conversions causing a break with their identity; It will be more like implanting the seed of the Word of the Gospel in a culture and allowing it to grow from within that. Following the radicality of a revelation in history, evangelization will be incarnating the Faith in a people and not taking out a few members from them and negating their identity.

In the new paradigm, mission, understood as evangelizing cultures, will lead to a communion of particular churches of peoples enjoying their full identity and autonomy; they will grow into the fullness of Christ through the mutuality and complementarity vibrantly present in that communion presided over by the successor of Peter. It is difficult to demarcate the boundaries of this communion in the monocultural, juridical and monarchic concept of the old paradigm. But it will be discernible by the law of revelation in history: in the self-transformation of persons and peoples from within, in the interrelatedness of nature, humans and God; where the Kingdom values are accepted, especially the meaning of kenosis and the power of resurrection available in the Person of Jesus Christ.

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A New Spirituality for the Mission of the Church in India Today

The overall crisis in the mission today is due to various factors, such as, theological shift, positive understanding of other religions as ways of salvation, increasing institutionalization of the Church, worldly and dehumanizing forces in the Church, and lack of motivation. It calls for a new missionary spirituality rooted in our soil and based on the primacy of *darsana*, *satya*, *ahimsa* and *brahmacarya*. Like the Apostles, only men and women who have really encountered the Lord face to face and had a powerful experience of Him can be missionaries. It is their truthful, transparent, self-emptying and centrifugal presence that makes the mission effective and meaningful.

The recent national survey of our mission work¹, conducted by the CBCI Commission for Proclamation and Communication reveals that there is a mission crisis in the Church in India. "Only a third of the respondents actively involved in the work (priests and sisters) expressed satisfaction with the missionary ethos in their dioceses"². It has been quite fashionable, specially among Church authorities, to blame modern theology for this decline in missionary zeal. There is definitely a noticeable shift in the theological thinking of the missionaries themselves. The vast majority of them "maintain that all religions are paths of salvation for their sincere followers"³, and therefore these missionaries "are gradually moving away from the ecclesio-centric approach to mission."⁴ Besides this theological

1 A national consultation on mission held at Ishvani Kendra, Pune, from 4-9 January 1994, came as a conclusion of this survey which "was conducted during the past three years in 35 dioceses belonging to 11 of the 12 ecclesiastical regions and to all the three individual churches". *Paths of Mission in India Today: Statement of the National Consultation on Mission, 4-9 January, 1994* (Pune, Ishvani Kendra, 1994), no. 4. Henceforth this document will be referred to as *Paths*.

2 Ibid., no. 5.

3 Ibid., no. 6.

4 Ibid., no. 7.

shift, there is also the fact that the number of Church institutions has grown very much in the recent years. The survey reveals that "the greater the number of Church institutions in a given area the lesser the involvement in missionary activities."⁵

However these factors do not either exclusively or even primarily explain the mission crisis in the Church in India. We must humbly accept the fact that "the Church is not immune to the dehumanizing forces operating in our society."⁶ Consumerism, competitive individualism, comfort culture and glamorous alternatives idealized by our media have deeply affected not only the Church at large but also those who have publicly professed a special commitment to the prophetic message of Jesus. Hence it is not at all surprising that the Church "experiences at times very acute and scandalizing tensions fomented by caste, language, ethnicity and ecclesial traditions."⁷ These conflicts undermine the missionary credibility of the Church. These conflicts are the result of a subtle struggle for power, a struggle we are not prepared to acknowledge, a struggle that betrays the lack of proper motivation for mission. This lack of proper motivation, I believe, is the primary explanation for the crisis in mission. Hence, if we want to renew our missionary enthusiasm, we need an adequate spirituality.

A New Spirituality

Mission is always a context-bound mystery. God's saving call comes to us in a particular situation. Were it to ignore this then it would cease to be the 'good news', and be reduced to an ideology. Hence the Church constantly needs to rethink her mission and its concrete modality. This need is all the more imperative because,

Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these changes recoil upon him, upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective, and upon his manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and to people. Hence we can already speak of a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well.⁸

5 Ibid., no. 9.

6 Ibid., no. 8.

7 Ibid.

8 Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 4. Eng. trans. *The Documents of Vatican II*

This explains why it was not easy for Vatican II to produce the document on the Church's missionary activity. It was not easy to find a focus for the different responses to the contemporary context, because "Opinions and standpoints were so divergent that the conciliar Missionary Commission never in any phase of its existence formed a unity or became an effective working team.⁹ The final text emerged only after six earlier drafts.¹⁰ If mission theology is to be constantly rethought then this is much more true of mission spirituality, for the latter depends on the former. we need a new spirituality for mission.

The newness I have in mind would first of all be in the very approach to spirituality. For many Christians 'spirituality' denotes a list of pious exercises and also some prohibitions. A person is considered spiritual if he attends Mass regularly, is faithful to his daily rosary, participates in some prayer meetings, novenas, pilgrimages, etc. He is considered spiritual if he gives up drinks during Lent, does not indulge in vulgar jokes, etc. While we do need some pious exercises and some disciplinary prohibitions, these do not constitute the core of spirituality. For me spirituality is first and foremost a vision, a way of looking at life with all its aspects, and the acts of piety and self-discipline are meaningful only if they are an expression of this vision.

The newness we are looking for will also emerge from a creative response to the Indian reality. Our land has been the fertile cradle and generous host of many great religions. On the other hand

we are faced with massive poverty, ecological devastation cultural disintegration, violence towards women, marginalization of the tribals, dalits and other weaker sections of our society, economic exploitation, aggressive fundamentalism, corruption and collapse of moral values.¹¹

The theological shift, emerging from Vatican II itself, will also make us question some of our earlier attitudes and approaches.

Bombay, St. Paul., 1966, p. 174.

9 S. Brechter, "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity", in H. Vorgimler (ed.) 1967-69, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, New York, Herder & Herder, IV, p. 93.

10 Ibid., pp. 87-182.

11 *Paths*, no. 16.

The primacy of darsana

In the past evangelization has been linked with the mission mandate supposedly given to the first disciples by the Risen Lord: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16.15). The history of the Church bears ample witness to the fact that we have taken this very seriously. However a more honest and critical examination of our past and even present will reveal to us that a lot of human ambition and imperialistic dreams lie hidden in many of our missionary undertakings, development projects, social service, etc. I am inclined to think that this is because our understanding of mission and its concrete expression has been institutionalised.¹² We are missionaries because we have received a mandate, if not from Jesus, at least from the local ordinary or from our religious superior. We are missionaries because we find ourselves in some 'mission territory'. We are missionaries because we are members of a 'missionary congregation.'

But both in the Old and in the New Testaments, mission is always linked with some kind of a powerful experience. Moses experienced God in the wilderness, and not only found his mission but also the courage to accept it (Ex 3.1-12).¹³ Had it not been for this experience he would have continued pasturing his father-in-law's flock, begetting a few more grandchildren for him! In like manner, Jesus' mission was rooted in what today we call

12 We can see this institutional approach to mission in the draft on mission prepared by the Preparatory Commission for the Missions to be discussed by the Second Vatican Council. It had the following seven chapters:

- 1 De regimine missionum (organization of missions)
- 2 De disciplina cleri (clerical way of life)
- 3 De religiosis (religious)
- 4 De sacramentis et de liturgia (sacraments and liturgy)
- 5 De disciplina populi christiani (way of life of Christians)
- 6 De studiis Clericorum (studies required of Clerics)
- 7 De Cooperatione missionali (missionary Cooperation)

The draft was rejected, and after many revisions the final text that was approved by the Council opens with doctrinal principles, beginning with the love the Father reveals through the mission of Jesus and of the Holy Spirit. As this revelation of love is for all the Church is called upon to continue the mission of Jesus. Vorgrimler, iv, 90-124.

13 His running away from Egypt out of fear of pharaoh (Ex 2.15) may well be a literary ploy to explain how he came to be in that wilderness.

the 'Abba-experience.' In his Gospel Luke gives us the best account of the development of the missionary consciousness of Jesus. While he was in prayer at his baptism he discovered his mission to be the servant of yahweh, and he is filled with the Holy Spirit (3.21-22).¹⁴ After this foundational experience Jesus would spend long hours all by himself in a lonely place, communing with his heavenly Father. This deep prayer-experience makes him see that his mission is not confined to his native Galilee (4.42-44). It enables him to choose his missionary co-workers (6.12-16). It opens his eyes to the bitter opposition he evokes and its possible consequences (9.18-22). It also gives him the assurance that he will not fail (9.28-36). His mission was to preach and to heal, to proclaim the Kingdom and make it already a reality. Even though the people regularly flocked to him precisely for this, yet he constantly made it a point to send them home, so that he could be alone with his Father¹ (5.15-16). Jesus knew that it was this silence that made his word powerful and his presence healing. In fact this contemplative aspect of Jesus is one of the best attested feature of his life. It was precisely because Jesus had experienced God as Love, as a gentle Abba, that with love and compassion he reached out to all people, but specially to the poor, the outcasts and the oppressed of his times. Having experienced Love, he himself loved us unto the end (Jn 13.1).

Only a person who has vision (*darsana*) or who has had powerful experience (*anubhava*) of the Lord can be missionary. It is this that explains the response of the first disciples of Jesus. Before they experience the Risen Lord they are so frightened that they not only lock themselves behind well-secured doors (Jn 20:19), but also want to confine Jesus within their narrow boundaries (Lk 24.29). The experience of the Risen Lord opens their eyes and then there is no longer any night, but only the dawn of the Resurrection, and so they set out to tell others what they had experienced (Lk 24:30-33). Even the Markan mandate should not be read as the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus, but the evangelist's way of conveying to us the deep impact the Risen Lord made on his disciples. Mission is setting out to share with others what we have experienced, and if we have

14 It is clear that in composing this account the evangelist had Is 42.1 in mind.

really had an experience of God then we will be proclaiming it even before we set out to do so.

Organisations and institutions can recruit workers. Are we not guilty of doing this in many of our so called vocation camps? Such recruitment does not presuppose any experience in the persons recruiting or being recruited. Advertisement skills on the one hand, and emotional, financial, social and 'religious' needs on the other are operating. The mission of Jesus presupposes being chosen by him (Jn 15:16). This brings me to the second meaning of *darsana*. When the Hindu goes to the temple he hopes to have a *darsana* of God. He hopes to see God. At the same time deep in his heart he also hopes that God will graciously look at him, that God will give him a *darsana*. He is like a young man who has just spied a lovely maiden in a crowded marriage party and is desperately trying to draw her attention, to be graced by her *darsana*. Mission is the experience of being graced.

As a result of his contemplation (*darsana*) and God's gracefilled glance at him (*darsana*), the devotee acquires a new vision. That is the third meaning of *darsana*, a way of looking at life in its totality, seeing it as God sees it. God is Love. He is the Abba of all. He yearns with love for all. Mission is the struggle to share in this yearning of the Abba of Jesus. This experience of the Abba becomes the source and the guiding norm of our own life, and consequently of our mission. Without this experience we may be at the most skilled salesmen, proclaiming not the message of salvation but trying to sell some sterile ideology, an ideology which we ourselves do not really believe.

To love as God loves, to give ourselves as Jesus did, is not that simple, because this calls for total self-emptying, a sharing in the mystery of Jesus' crucifixion. We can love to the extent we are free of ourselves. Today we know from behavioural sciences that a large part of our conscious behaviour originates and is guided by sub-conscious factors. So often our feeling of being free is only an illusion, the result of our ignorance (*avidya*). So often our loud profession "I love you" is only a subtle plea "I need your love". Our hearts can and do cheat us. Only the Lord can fully understand them (Jer 17:9-10). The

silence of contemplation brings us face to face with our inner self. We not only see our deep rooted inborn and acquired needs, but have the humility to accept them honestly. The more we realise their existence and the powerful hold they have on us the more will we see how much our behaviour is shaped, not by freedom or by conscious choice, but by our self-asserting, self-preserving, and self-defending needs. Only the experience of a greater Love, a Love that surpasses all our understanding, can take us beyond our little egos.

The primacy of Satya

When our approach to mission gets institutionalized, then we try to give primacy to action: direct proclamation, different forms of service, and now action on behalf of the poor, the marginalized etc. The New Testament gives us another perspective. God is presented primarily not as one who acts on behalf of His people. He is not merely Israel¹⁵. He is Emmanuel, "God with us (Mt 1:23)". He does not send Moses to Egypt, but He himself goes there, where His people are (Mt 2:14), pitching his tent not outside the camp (Ex 33:7), but right in their midst (Jn 1:14). What is emphasized is not just His saving activity but above all His loving presence with His people. Jesus is the embodiment of this presence. He not only speaks the Word of God and brings the message of salvation, but He is that Word, that message. Thus the New Testament gives primacy to *satya*, truth-embodiment presence.

When action becomes more important than presence then we tend to give primacy to information and knowledge, to performance and production, to equipment and well organized institutions, to flashy buildings and glamorous media. Then what becomes important is not my inner reality but the outer appearance, not what I am but what I can do and possess, not the practice of Christ-like love and compassion but the frequenting of sacraments, novenas, pilgrimages, not what I say but how I say it. The medium itself becomes

15 J.L. McKenzie, after admitting that the etymology of the word is not known for sure, maintains that morphologically 'Israel' would signify "let El contend". *Dictionary of the Bible*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1975, p. 403. Thus, simplifying a bit, we can say that in the Old Testament God reveals himself as one who acts on behalf of his people.

the message. Competence, effective action and quick results become more important than commitment, authentic presence and honest effort. Quantity gets greater importance than quality. This is also the way contemporary society tends to think. An authentic experience of God will give us the realisation that the quality of our life is more important than our professional competence. This experience will help us to see that what we are is more important than what we have or what we can do. The missionary needs information, competence, and effective media.

But there is the temptation to use them as a cover for our lack of wisdom, commitment and authentic presence. *Darsana* will help us to realize the primacy of *satya* (truth-embodiment existence). Then the messenger becomes the message, a sign of contradiction, a silent but powerful prophetic critique of the modern cult of false gods: competitive careerism and individual success. There is ample evidence that this cult is quite prevalent in the Church.

When *satya* becomes primary then our mission is characterized by *ahimsa*. The missionary does not resort to any kind of fraud, intimidation or manipulation. All these are forms of *himsa* (violence), and very much part of our modern advertisement-shaped life. Real *satya* has its own attraction, appealing to what is deeply human in each one of us. If it does not have this attraction then either it is not the real truth, and so we can abandon it, or it has not been effectively witnessed to and then we need conversion. Truth can be effectively proclaimed only by being witnessed to. Then the missionary constantly critiques his own existence.

The primacy of *satya*, the realization that what I am is more important, will make the missionary deeply detached from worldly possessions and values. The commitment to evangelical poverty will then mean not merely a detachment from wealth and material goods but also detachment from worldly concerns like success, prestige, status, popularity etc. In our tradition the spiritual person is characterised by *vairagya*. This inner simplicity is reflected in his outward behaviour, his conversation, his life-style. This commitment to evangelical simplicity becomes all the more imperative for us today and this

for two reasons. First, our mission must be related to the actual situation of our country. In spite of all our efforts at development, a great number of our people are still very poor. Spiritual simplicity and evangelical poverty will mean not merely inner freedom and spirit of detachment, but also an effort to share in some way the life of our people, to participate in their struggle for survival, to make our own their joys and sorrows. We must continue the mission of Emmanuel. Second, our mission is to be exercised in the contemporary context. Today we are surrounded by a powerful culture of dehumanizing consumerism, and this poses a greater threat to human survival than all nuclear weapons put together. For many people today personal commitment and moral values are secondary while money and all the pleasure and glamour money can bring have become primary.

The primacy of Brahmacarya

To be a *brahmacarin* means to be constantly walking (*carya*) towards God (Brahman), to be on a journey in search of the sacred (*tirtha-yatra*), to be a pilgrim. We can be authentically pilgrim only by constantly going beyond all boundaries, by being on the move, just as Jesus was. This applies not only to our spiritual growth but also to our mission theology. A lot of harm to the mission of Jesus has been done because of our narrow theology. We tend to hold on to outdated approaches to the mystery of Jesus and to his mission because we are afraid to cross boundaries. A boundary-free existence is not easy. We prefer to tread the beaten path. Unredeemed as we are, we feel more comfortable behind closed doors (Jn 21:19). The experience of the Risen Lord drove the first disciples to the ends of the earth. So too if we have really experienced God we will be theologically open. By this I do not mean that we naively abandon what we have learnt from our childhood, but that we examine seriously and sincerely what modern Biblical scholarship and philosophy have to say. Theological openness is essential to missionary spirituality, for that matter to any form of Christian life and thought claiming to be mature.

Our journey towards God means an affirming of a greater reality (*brahman*)¹⁶, and this again suggests the transcending of

16 The word *brahman* comes from the root *brh* (to expand, to grow, to become big).

constraining boundaries. Jesus used two images to explain to us our mission: "You are the salt of the earth. . . You are the light of the world (Mt 5:13-14). Light, salt and leaven (Mt 13:33) operate by a centrifugal movement which is possible only by constantly going beyond all boundaries, and by losing their visible identity. Normally we do not see the salt or the leaven in our food, but we know it is there. The salt and the leaven that is visible in our food can be problematic. So too usually we do not pay attention to the source of light but because there is light we can see other realities. Very often missionary endeavour has been blunted because we have been unduly concerned for "our Church", "our flock", "our institutions" etc. We forgot that the Church can find meaning only by being in the service of a greater reality, the Kingdom of God. We were more anxious about the appearance of the Church and its survival than about the emergence of the Kingdom and its all-embracing demand.

The Kingdom of God is concerned for the total happiness of all human persons, and not just of souls, for a healthy earth and not just a pious Church. Today human life is threatened by a polluted environment and an unjust society. Concern for ecological balance needs a spiritual backing: a life of prayer nurtured by the experience of God's presence in the beauty of nature. The struggle for justice means a way of life that brings us closer to the poor, the marginalized, the weak and the vulnerable. It means that our life-style is not consumeristic, because it is this consumerism that eventually explains the social injustice we see today: few people in power want to have the most and the best of this earth's bounty.

If the Kingdom is greater than the Church, then the workers of this Kingdom are more than the missionaries of the Church. The missionary who is serious about the Kingdom will gladly seek to cooperate not only with workers from within the Church — and this is not always the case — but also with all people of good will who in their own way are struggling to make God's Kingdom a little more real on this earth. This capacity for collaboration is also an essential part of missionary spirituality. We will talk less and less of Christian schools, hospitals, social projects, and think more and more in terms of human undertakings. If we need to be co-workers with all people of good will, then

this is possible only if we are also co-pilgrims with them, sharing with them their search for God, reverentially bowing down before their spiritual teachers, humbly learning from their spiritual tradition, gratefully enriching our life with their inner experience. Authentic missionary spirituality will emerge from a dialogue with peoples of other faith traditions.

Will not such an approach to mission confuse our identity? Will a movement that does not have a definite identity, an identity concretised in its own institutions, evoke a firm and lasting response? The question of identity can be approached in two ways. First, we can identify a community through its visible boundaries: its rituals, set of beliefs, code of individual and social behaviour, etc. The Church then becomes a sanctuary. A sanctuary has very clear boundaries. The many "Christian" colonies that we find in different parts of India are the result of this sanctuary mentality.¹⁷ However a community can also be identified in relation to its inner life-principle: the source of its inspiration, its way of looking at and commitment to life etc. The identity of the disciples of Jesus will be revealed by their *darsana*, by their contemplative life and vision that is the fruit of this contemplation. As Karl Rahner said, "The Christian of the future will be a mystic, or he or she will not exist at all".¹⁸

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17 K.N. Sahay, *Christianity and Cultural Change in India*, New Delhi, Inter-India Pbs., 1986, 114.

R. B. Sharma, *Christian Missions in North India 1813-1913: A case study of Meerut Division and Dhera Dun District*, Delhi, Mittal Pubs., 1988, 198.

D. Sward, *The Christian Missionaries in Orissa: Their Impact on Nineteenth Century Society*, Calcutta, Punthi Pustak, 1990, 214.

18 Quoted by *Paths*, no.27

Salvation and Evangelization

The new understanding of religions which has entered into the awareness of the Church, has called for a rethinking on the nature of her mission of evangelization. If salvation is offered in other religions, what is the specific contribution that the Church is offering to the world by proclaiming the saving message of Christ? According to the Gospel, salvation is a humanization process which should take place already in this world; it is not a state of life that is to be arrived in the next life. Besides, it is not religion, including Christianity, that saves humanity; salvation is the result of a response that each human being makes to God. Religions can facilitate it. Christianity does it in a specific way following the lines traced by Christ. The driving force of evangelization is primarily the urge that each Christian feels to communicate the message of Christ; it is not motivated by the fear that without the Christian message people will not be saved. In doing this the Church is in continuous dialogue and communication with all those who are engaged in the same process.

Missionary work has been considered as the work for the salvation of souls. In fact it was this zeal for souls that made many priests and religious to leave their country in order to preach the Gospel to the peoples of the world, especially of those parts of the world populated by the adherents of religions other than Christianity. The purpose of evangelical work was quite clear—the conversion of the pagan to ensure his eternal salvation. In the words of the magisterium: 'We must win as many souls as possible for Christ'¹. With Vatican II, however, there is a changed attitude in the Church towards the salvific value of other religions: 'The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men'². 'Truth and

1. Benedict XV, Encyclical Letter Maximum Illud, 1919

2. Nostra Aetate n. 2.

grace are found among the nations, as a sort of secret presence of God"³. Speaking of the attitude of the Christians towards the people of other religions the Council exhorts: "They should be familiar with their national and religious traditions and uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among them"⁴.

In the light of these statements of Vatican II, a question has been raised by many missionaries: If salvation is available in other religions, what is the real need of proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Saviour? All those spiritual concerns for the salvation of souls which motivated the missionary activities of many zealous men and women are no more so urgent and pressing. And yet we find that the very purpose of the existence of the Christian community is the proclamation of Christ, the good news for humanity. It is this sense of mission that made the Church grow in the course of centuries. It is this very same sense of mission that the II Vatican Council which is called a new Pentecost, wants to reawaken in the Church. How can we solve this problem which seems to place the very existence and life of the Church in a strange paradoxical situation?

1. What is salvation?

In moments of change and crisis, it is a healthy practice to subject our own convictions to a critique. This will enable us to be relevant to the present, as well as help us to have better clarity in our convictions. This clarity will enable us to relaunch our life and mission with greater vigour and relevance. In our case, perhaps, we need to re-examine our concept of salvation.

The early Church proclaimed Jesus as Saviour because he obtained the redemption of mankind by his death and resurrection. Here, salvation is equal to liberation from bondage. The ultimate reason of this bondage, Jesus very clearly states, is the sin of man, his alienation from his neighbour. Hence salvation is present where there is repentance and conversion. The manifestation of this salvation is the Christian community, which has for its identity, mutual love and fraternal sharing. This concept of salvation underwent a change as the Church began to realize

³: Ad Gentes n. 9

⁴: Ad Gentes n. 11.

that this community of love is not acceptable to the world; it has to undergo persecutions and sufferings. It is at this time that we find a change: salvation is presented as an eschatological reality. The Christian community considered itself as one that is equipped with all the means necessary for arriving at this eschatological Phase of life. With the institutionalization of the Church, the membership of this Church becomes necessary for salvation. In fact Origen says: "Let no man deceive himself. Outside this house, that is, outside the Church no one is saved"⁵. And Cyprian affirms the same in more emphatic terms: "He who leaves the Church does not attain to the reward of Christ, he is stranger, profane, an enemy. He cannot have God as his father who has not the Church as his mother. If there was one who outside the ark of Noah could escape, then also one who is outside the Church may be saved"⁶. It is at this juncture baptism by which one becomes the member of the Church is attached to salvation as an eschatological reality, while in the early preaching baptism is attached to the kingdom of God which is the realization of the rule of God's love in the world of which the Christian community, as a community of love and sharing, was a sign. The mission of the Church to proclaim the salvation announced and effected by Christ is interpreted as an invitation to enter into the institutional Church. As a consequence all have to leave their religious institutions and enter into the institution called the Church in order to be saved. At least it was considered as the ordinary means of salvation after the promulgation of the Gospel. Individuals may be saved, but the religions other than Christianity were not considered as institutions of salvation. "For Christian theology, in effect, salvation is not a comparative category at all, but a unique one. The Christian assertion that non-Christians do not have it implies, in effect, that there is nothing non-Christian describable by the word 'salvation'. Theologians and missionaries discuss salvation largely within the circle of individual and corporate Christian experience. Salvation is so uniquely Christian that it is hardly worth one's effort to look for instances of it in religions other

⁵. Origen, In Jesu Nave 3, 5; MG 12, 841.

⁶. Cyprian, De Unitate Ecclesiae 6; CSEL, 3/1, 214.

than the Christian''⁷. As we have seen above, this idea of salvation has to be revised in the light of the position taken by Vatican II.

Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical 'Evangelii nuntiandi' gives a description of the objective to be achieved through the proclamation of the saving message of the Gospel: transforming humanity from within and making it new: 'Now I am making the whole of creation new'⁸. We may elaborate this statement along the following lines: it means the coming of God's final and universal rule which will manifest itself in the emergence of a new society (human, equal, fraternal, participatory, caring, sharing and just) in which all human persons can be like brothers and sisters experiencing God's fatherly gratuitous love, embodying and integrating the values of freedom, fellowship and justice, in human relationships and activities, both personal and structural. This is the kingdom of God.⁹. This is the salvation that was announced at the birth of Jesus, the Saviour, by the angels: "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favours" (Lk. 2: 14). And again when Christ appears to proclaim his salvation he says: "The time has come and the Kingdom of God is close at hand" (Mk. 1: 14). Salvation, therefore, is transformation of this world according to the plan of God. The eschatological aspect is not left out; but it is connected closely with this transformation. We may say that salvation is, therefore, eschatologising rather than eschatological, understood as a state after this life. The Church plays an important role in this, not by serving as an antichamber of the kingdom of God at its eschatological phase, but as a servant of the kingdom in its realization. That is why she is called 'sacrament of salvation'. A sacrament contains the reality in order to express it in terms of life and relationship. In the same way the Church experie-

7. Willard G. Oxtoby, Reflections on the idea of 'Salvation' in Eric J. Sharpe and John R. Hinnells (ed.), Man and His salvation, pp. 29-30, London 1973.

8. Evangelii nuntiandi n. 18,

9. D. S. Amalorpavadass, Vision, thrust and policy for evangelization, Bangalore 1985, pg. 28.

nces this salvation in order to effect it in the world through her ministry. She is, therefore, the minister of the kingdom of God. That is why the II Vatican Council says: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men, who united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all men. That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history"¹⁰ In this understanding of salvation we have a total vision of reality without absolutizing any particular institution which claims to possess the monopoly of salvation. It also safeguards us against a dichotomy of body and soul which is so alien to the Gospel teaching of salvation based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

2. Religion and salvation

All religions have claimed to possess the power to offer salvation to their adherents. How true and authentic is this claim?

In the first place, we have to admit that the religions fall within the saving plan of God. We cannot confine it to the limits of Judaeo-Christian history. God's saving action and presence are universally operative in time and space; they were operative before the foundation of the institutional Church by Christ and are active outside the Church also today, "The different sacred scriptures and rites of the religious traditions of the world can be in various degrees, expressions of a divine manifestation and can be conducive to salvation."¹¹ Religious Pluralism is to be considered as a rich theophany, rather than as an obstacle to the knowledge of the true God. In fact, because of the many religions of the world we have a great variety of religious responses all of which can be considered as a rich patrimony of humanity. That is why Tagore says: "The full self-

¹⁰. Gaudium et Spes n. 1

¹¹. Declaration of the International Theological Conference of Nagpur on Evangelization, in Service and Salvation Bangalore, T P I 1973 p. 5, n. 16.

expression of God is in the variedness of creation; and our attitude towards the Infinite must in its expression also have a variedness of individuality, ceaseless and unending"¹². It cannot be however denied that, the religions also have contributed towards the distortion of the image of God. For this reason religions may not always lead human beings to salvation. We cannot, therefore, say in an absolute sense that religions save human beings. But as J. Neuner says: "We do not say that 'Hinduism saves the Hindus', but God can and as far as we can see, often does use the sacred traditions of Hinduism to lead Hindus to an attitude of faith and love, to the fundamental option which is their way of salvation"¹³. This can be said also about Christianity. What saves the person according to Christianity is his conversion and change of heart. He has to repent and believe in the Gospel (Mk. 1:15). The Church offers him this possibility through her ministry. Hence we may say that religion does not save anybody; but God saves people through the religion, provided that two conditions are fulfilled: religion presents God's offer of salvation without distorting it and the person who receives it responds to this offer adequately.

If all religions have the same role to play with regard to salvation, can people choose any of them indiscriminately? In other words, if all religions are paths to salvation, are we free to choose any of these paths? Are they all equal? Here we have to take into account the fact that God's offer of salvation is not like the offer of a variety of goods in a supermarket. It is a personal offer and therefore it calls for a unique response. What the religions can do is only to facilitate the reception and response of this offer on the part of the human person concerned. However, religions can fulfill this role of facilitation if they are in a state of dialogue. If they are in confrontation with one another through the absolutization of their doctrinal, legal or ritual positions, they can prevent the people from giving the proper response to God. In fact this happened in Palestine at

¹². R. Tagore, 'The Reality of Religion', in C. Isherwood (ed) Vedanta for Modern Man, New York 1972, pg. 100.

¹³. J. Neuner, 'Introduction to the Bombay Seminar,' in IES 4 (1965) p. 172.

the time of Jesus. It has happened in our country in the case of Ayodhya issue of Ram Janma Bhoomi and Babri Masjid.

3. Jesus and Salvation

How did Jesus offer salvation to the world? Did he do it through a religion as in the case of many religious founders? It is here that we shall find the uniqueness of Christian offer of salvation. In the very first place, Jesus did not do it in a competitive spirit, much less in a spirit of confrontation. He stated it very clearly: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill" (Mt; 5, 17). These words of Christ must be applied not only to the Jewish religious practices, but to all other religions as well. But this 'fulfillment' theory must not be interpreted by the Church in order to affirm her superiority over the other religions. Christ is initiating here a dialogical process between God and the human situating Himself fully within our human condition. In fact his message of salvation is not primarily a collection of truths, but the proclamation of the universal love of God. It is in the light of this that the interaction takes place among the various religions. This calls for a positive approach to religions. Christ in fact, did it on the Cross when he gathered all the peoples in an act of love into a community of love.

Another characteristic of the salvation offered by Christ is its incarnational approach. God has truly revealed Himself in the human; the human is the true image of God. Genuine human life is authentic religious life. Jesus presents salvation as the creation of this human being according to the image of God. In fact the religiousness of the first Christians was manifested through their human relationship; the rituals of that first community were the symbols of human love. The Eucharist was 'the breaking of the bread' and not merely 'transubstantiation' of bread by which Christ became an object of adoration. In the human gesture of sharing bread, Christ became present in their midst and they experienced his living presence which made them live in his Spirit, which is a Spirit of love and communion.

Finally, the salvation which Christ came to establish was the kingdom of God, that is a community of human beings that lived entirely conditioned by love. The community of the

saved were those who became members of this transformed community of Jesus. "And day by day, the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2: 47). That community revealed the saving presence of God in its midst. "For a Christian the eschatological hope is worth nothing when it is not manifested in watchfulness for present opportunities and in a commitment to the good and salvation of man"¹⁴.

As is evident, the uniqueness of salvation, presented by Jesus, is beyond all religions, in the sense that it is not bound by institutional regulations and rituals. Its uniqueness, by its very nature is dialogical. It is, therefore, open to dialogue with the offers of salvation made by all religions and is capable of entering into a healthy inter-action with all of them without losing its specificity and identity.

4. Evangelizing mission of the Church

In the light of what we have said above regarding the understanding of salvation what would be the role of the Church when it has to meet other religions in its evangelizing mission? According to Karl Rahner, perhaps the most serious problem the Church will have to face in the future will be that of explaining the soteriological meaning of Christianity in a pluri-religious world, where religions have acquired such an important role¹⁵. In order to deal with this problem both practically and theoretically, we need to review our concept of the Church. As long as we keep on identifying the Church with institutional Church, we will have to fall back on the attitudes and policies that result from a comparison or confrontation with other religions and their understanding of salvation. An ancient Christian writer describes the Christian community, the Church, in these words: "Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by either country, speech or customs; the fact is, they nowhere settle in cities of their own, they use no peculiar language, they culti-

¹⁴. Bernard Haring, Evangelisation Today, Society of St. Paul, Slough, England 1974, pg. 2.

¹⁵. Jesus Lopez-Guy S. J., Contemporary Missiology, in Mission for the Third millennium published by Pontifical Missionary Union, Rome 1993 pg.21.

vate no strange mode of life...they conform to the customs of the country in dress, food and way of living in general''¹⁶. This shows that the Christian community is a group of men and women fully integrated into the human community. They distinguished themselves only through their extraordinary humaneness manifested in their love for one another. What made them become like this was the action of the Spirit of Christ working in them; since the Spirit is the one that transforms the world, they were in dialogue with the world. The Spirit urges them towards the fullness of growth; they look forward and contribute their share to build up a better world.

In this process they also encounter religions that claim that they too, have a salvific mission in the world. They recognize the salvific elements existing in these religions and arrive at a new understanding of their mission. They believe that the world' when taken seriously, can constitute a genuine basis for the understanding of God's plan. As a result, they become a searching Church. What would be the lines along which this searching Church will continue her mission of evangelization?

i) She will realize that God's plan of salvation is bigger than that of the Church. Therefore before beginning her mission, she will try reverently to discover His action in the midst of the peoples, manifested even through their religions.

ii) Since they are the result of the responses that men and women have given to God who offered them His salvation, they cannot be put in opposition to the Church.

iii) It is necessary to enter into dialogue with them in order to realize that they too have salvific values. Perhaps these values will enable the Christians to formulate their own message of salvation in a better way.

iv) The mission of evangelization will continue with a view to share our own value systems with others by which, they too will be enriched in their response to God, even as they remain in their religious belief.

v) The Church should realize that her mission is not to save others, but to evangelize others, that is, to communicate the

¹⁶. Epistle to Diognetus ch. 5.

Good News to them. What would be the consequences of this Gospel proclamation, will depend on them.

vi) The real motivation for proclaiming the Gospel comes from one's deep experience of the same Gospel as well as from the urge that one has to share the Good news with others in a spirit of fellowship rather than from a point of view of superiority complex.

vii) Finally, we have seen that Christ came to transform humanity rather than to found another religion. This specificity of Christian message of salvation has to be proclaimed in all its clarity and power without in any way aiming at the destruction of the religious convictions of others. If the Church's proclamation calls for some change in their religiousness, it is their duty to respond to it. The Church need not interfere in that matter.

5. Towards a new model of evangelization

To a great extent, our mission of evangelization has been conditioned by the desire to make people join the institutional Church. Baptism, which is the means by which this took place, was considered necessary for salvation. This was caused by the conviction that non-Christian religions as institutions could not be means of salvation; but individuals could be saved if they were honest and upright. What saves them is their honesty and not their religion.

In the changed scenario of the understanding of and relationship with other religions, it is necessary that the Church looks at her mission of evangelization in a different way. In many places in India, it will never be possible for us to succeed in our evangelizing mission in terms of baptism and membership in the institutional Church. Could we not think of an evangelizing mission with a view to build up genuine human communities, formed in the light of the Gospel principles? Could we not aim at a mission that questions all dehumanizing structures and practices that exist in our society? This is genuine evangelization because this will gradually bring about the kingdom of God. Although the normal process by which the kingdom of God is realized is through the ministry of the Church, in certain circumstances, this church will never come into existence. In such situations, we should be able to aim directly at the coming of the

Kingdom. It is possible to be members of the kingdom of God, even if one remains in another religion, provided sin and all inhuman elements are eliminated from his life. Jesus came only to remove sin and the only enemy of the Kingdom is sin and inhumanity. It is possible to continue our evangelization in this way even if it does not result in a change of religious adherence. Of course the result of such an evangelization will not be statistically verifiable because it will create only a Kingdom that is hidden in the midst of the human community.

Conclusion

The fact that there are salvific elements in other religions should be for us a source of joy rather than a cause for dampening our enthusiasm for the Gospel. Our primary aim is not the salvation of souls, but the transformation of the human. We shall always find enough opportunities to do this. The core of the Gospel is the loving kindness of God manifested to the poor and needy of this world. In fact before working any of his miracles Jesus shows his pity and human concern for the people. This is the real Christian salvation. We can always offer this to all those who come into contact with us, whether they are going to become Christians or not. Let the love of our brothers and sisters in need be the driving force that operates in our evangelizing mission. Then we shall always find sufficient motivation for continuing to preach Christ to all those whom we meet, for Christ will continue to give his joy, peace and total well-being, through our ministry, to all those to whom we are sent.

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Discussion Forum

Neither Christomonism nor Christodualism

Ignatius Puthiadam in his well-thought chapter "Theology of Religions in the Indian Context" published in one of the important volumes of the "Indian Theological Association"¹ describing summarily my christological view writes: "This Jesus Christ has been incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth, but not merely in Jesus of Nazareth" (p. 206).

I have never said this, and it is certainly not my belief. Time and again I have repeated that the very idea [of the christian Incarnation is unique even qua idea and does not admit plurality. Morphologically speaking, from the point of view of a Science of Religions, the christian self-understanding of Incarnation does not allow a repetition. It would amount to a contradiction in terms. Therefore, from a very phenomenological point of view, the christian Incarnation cannot be compared to the hindu idea of 'avatara.' This latter one is a docetic appearance of God for the sake of the dharma, as the Gita says. Krishna is God in the form of Man. An 'avatara' of Vishnu may be an animal because it is not a true animal, but the true God. Christ does not claim to be The God. He is a real Man, who is also the Son of the trinitarian God. He is the Son of God, equal to God, and the "Son of Man", equal to Man. He is as much divine as human. Incarnation outside the Trinity is simply an aberration. All hangs together.

The two universes are different and we cannot draw any valid comparison isolating them from their respective contexts.

First of all, I would not say that "Jesus Christ has been incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth". I used to say, and repeat it here, that the Logos has been incarnated. I do not even affirm

1. Religious Pluralism. An Indian Christian Perspective, edited by K. Pathil, Delhi (I.S.P.C.K) 1991 pp. 191-228,

that this Logos has been incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth is not the hypostasis. I state that the incarnated Logos is Jesus of Nazareth. For a similar reason that if there were "two" Gods in the monotheistic and scholastic conception of the Divinity, the "two", being infinite, they would be identical and thus coincide; if there were "two" Incarnations, in the christian sense, the two would be identical and also coincide. "The Unknown Christ of Hinduism" is not 'another' Christ, and yet it is not the 'same' Christ christians know. It is unknown to them—and known to the hindus under other names, aspects and dimensions of that Mystery for which the christian has no other name than Christ. So, I am not saying that the "hindu Christ" is the 'same' as the "christian Christ". I am defending that that Mystery, which the christian cannot but call Christ, has aspects, manifestations, attributes, and what not, unknown to the christian, that other people, believe 'are' "revealed" to them and for which they give different names.

This prevents me to subscribe to the continuation of Puthiadam's sentence, allegedly describing my position: "but not merely in Jesus of Nazareth". Jesus of Nazareth is the unique Incarnation. A plurality of Incarnations has no meaning whatsoever in an orthodox christian self-interpretation.

The Incarnation is unique by definition. Everything in as much as it is real unique. And here begins the origin of the misinterpretation of my position.

To begin with, a great part of the problem stems from the "contamination" of modern scientific knowledge to philosophical thinking. Modern science claims to be such an objective description of phenomena that its sociological prestige leads us to believe that we can have true knowledge without love and it is only such a knowledge which includes love that discloses for us the uniqueness of each and every thing. For each mother her son is not just a "human being", interchangeable with any other one. Elsewhere I have made the distinction between the identification (of objective data) and the identity (of real things, specially persons). But the uniqueness of Incarnation goes beyond this. There is only a unique Ravi for the mother, but there are many "human beings". There is only one Christ for christians, but there may be many "divine beings"—just to keep the parallelism and without specifying it further in this occasion.

The christian Incarnation - it is my belief and personal experience- is the christian language expressing, however inadequately, the experience of the Mystery - using this word as a symbol for what christian Scripture and the Gita call the divine mystery. But the christian language is only one language - and I do not use the word language in any nominalistic sense but as a real symbol of what it symbolizes. Yet symbols are unlike concepts, by nature polysemic.

This Mystery may have many other "aspects" which other religions and traditions have named and experienced differently. And here I have also stressed time and again that neither I am, nor do we have the duty of being a kantian so as to have to admit a "thing in itself", a 'noumenon' which we figure out in different ways. The Mystery has surely no 'noumenon,' whatever the fate of this concept may be in the sublunar world. Concepts are more or less adequate replicas of things and events. Science deals with concepts, but concepts are totally inadequate when dealing with the Ultimate - be it called Mystery, God, Brahman, Shunyata, Tao or whatever. So it is not that hindus, for example, worship "that thing" which christians call Christ. The "ishtadevata-s" are not docetic either. But this is not my topic now.

Christians believe and "know" one aspect, or some dimensions, of this Mystery. Others believe in and "know" other aspects or dimensions not of "the same thing", or of an unexisting "noumenon", but of reality I may say here. Both have a claim to embrace the All, yet not epistemologically, but in an embrace which love can only somewhat re-enact and faith babble. We cannot deal with Ultimates as we deal with all the other human experiences.

To affirm that there may be many Christs is not convincing for me, nor, I would submit, for any orthodox christian. To affirm that there is only one Christ (about whom we, at least, know his "true" name) would amount to an equally unacceptable christomonism. Here is the christian theological locus for 'advaita'- and for the indic contribution to a more adequate wisdom for our times. But again I have to restrain myself in this short note. I am writing this brief comment just to clarify my position, but also to recommend the admirable article of puthiadam.

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